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The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION | MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 2026

Democracy isn't dead yet in India

Kapil Komireddi

OPINION

NEW DELHI For more than three decades, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India has cultivated a political mystique sustained by fear, awe and reverence, giving rise to one of the most formidable cults of personality in the democratic world.

That image has disintegrated.

What began as a scattered outcry by students over the leaking of questions on medical school entrance exams morphed over several weeks into the most politically consequential mutiny against the prime minister of his 12 years in power.

A broad coalition of students, recent graduates, unemployed workers, farmers and a handful of celebrities rallied behind the movement. In an unmatched display of public ridicule, they mocked the most powerful Indian leader in two generations on the streets and across social media before marching on Parliament in New Delhi. Police officers armed with batons and tear gas descended on protesters. But two weekends ago Mr. Modi, forced into a corner, ultimately acquiesced to the resignation of his education minister — the unliekliest of concessions from a man whose defining political trait has been his unwillingness to yield.

This summer's youth-led revolt has punctured Narendra Modi's aura and showed that Indian democracy may still be able to renew itself from below.

This summer's uprising was about far more than leaked examinations. It was a test of Indian democracy's capacity to correct itself.

The movement was an eruption of the accumulated frustrations of a generation of younger Indians who could no longer reconcile their wretched reality with the fable of a prosperous "New India" purveyed by the prime minister. The country's seemingly invincible leader was forced into a rare retreat, suggesting that despite a decade of efforts by Mr. Modi to hollow out democratic institutions and concentrate power around himself, the ultimate guardians of Indian democracy may still be its citizens.

Mr. Modi rose to power on the promise of a corruption-free land of progress and opportunity where millions of jobs would be created and poor Indian citizens could receive 1.5 million rupees (about $15,700 at current exchange rates) if money allegedly stashed in foreign banks by corrupt

KOMIREDDI, PAGE 10

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.

ULET IFANSASTI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Drilling for oil the old-fashioned way

In a corner of Java, Indonesia, known as "Little Texas," workers at community-run wells use sticks, buckets and old truck engines to extract crude. *PAGE 7*

Cut off, Cuba is keeping on

HAVANA

With its ingenuity, grit and solar panels, island gets by amid oil blockade

BY JACK NICAS

For months, President Trump has been predicting that Cuba is about to collapse.

"It's just going to fall," he told reporters on Jan. 4, a day after taking control of Venezuela's oil, which had been Cuba's lifeline.

He then imposed an oil blockade that has pushed the island into its worst ever energy crisis, with mass blackouts now lasting nearly all day. And yet, more than six months later, the Cuban government and people are still standing.

Last month, we visited the country to understand how. After a week on the ground, we found that while Cubans are clearly suffering, they are also doing what perhaps they do best: adapting.

They are swapping their gas-guzzling 1950s American cars for electric motorcycles and rickshaws from China; importing hefty lithium batteries to keep televisions and fans running through blackouts; jury-rigging generators to run on more accessible natural gas; and installing solar panels on rooftops and even vehicles.

Together, the workarounds amount to a new Cuban energy grid — this one more in the hands of the Cuban people, propping up society with the electricity off and fuel lines dry.

These solutions have enabled the Cuban government to ration power by turning on the lights for just a few hours a day, stretching out whatever scarce fuel it has left in an effort to withstand Washington's intense pressure campaign.

LIZETTE POOLE GONZALEZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Electric vehicles in front of a building with solar panels in Havana. Cubans, who one farmer said "thrive amid crisis," are looking for solutions to the U.S. fuel blockade.

The result is that Cuba has lasted far longer without fuel shipments than the Trump administration appears to have expected.

Over nearly seven decades of U.S. pressure, Cuba has defied the odds and improvised to survive. Now it seems that Mr. Trump, like many U.S. presidents before him, is also finding that toppling the government founded by Fidel Castro is not so simple.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters late last month that the Trump administration still wants to see the Cuban government fall. "We're prepared to be very realistic about how you do that, and patient," he said. "These are complex things that take time, and obviously we're prepared to do what we can."

The Cuban government is seeking a deal. "Cuba is not an enemy of the United States," Carlos Fernández de Cossío, Cuba's deputy foreign minister, said in an interview. "What we would like is a constructive and respectful relationship."

In the meantime, the Cuban people, as they have for decades, are making do. "Cubans thrive amid crisis," said Hum-

CUBA, PAGE 5

Iran plotted wider war with help from proxies

Strategy to raise costs of conflict for Trump was devised during cease-fire

BY FARNAZ FASSIHI AND NEIL MACFARQUHAR

A drone attack sent smoke billowing from a giant Saudi oil facility, the largest such plant in the world. Two gas tankers burst into flames at an Egyptian port near the Suez Canal, a crucial choke point in global trade. Fireballs erupted over Jordan as missiles flew toward a base housing U.S. personnel.

War has enveloped a widening circle of targets across the Middle East in recent days, as Iran and its phalanx of proxy militias have sought to strike at U.S. allies, roil global markets and push the United States to halt its campaign against the Islamic Republic.

The attacks are part of what two senior Iranian officials depicted as a step-by-step plan, devised in secret during a fleeting cease-fire this spring, that would use Iran's allies to escalate attacks if the United States intensified its assaults. The goal, the officials said, was to make the war as costly as possible for President Trump.

Mahdi Mohammadi, a senior adviser to Iran's chief negotiator, even crowed on social media about the strategy with the proxy forces, which are known in the region as the "Axis of Resistance."

"The rules of the conflict are changing and being rewritten, we are creating new conditions and platforms in the war," Mr. Mohammadi said. "The fronts are multiplying from different directions in the region; they are of course coordinated but act independently. A new axis of resistance is emerging with new players."

Mr. Trump said late Saturday that he had canceled threatened U.S. strikes on Iran, provided a deal could be reached rapidly that reopened the Strait of Hormuz and ended what he described as Iran's nuclear threat.

Writing on Truth Social, Mr. Trump said that Iran and other Middle Eastern countries had asked him to delay military action, claiming that the "perimeters of a deal" had been reached. He also claimed that Israel had jointly committed to a pause in fighting. The Israeli government has not publicly confirmed its agreement.

Iran and its allies have taken powerful blows since 2023, when the militant group Hamas attacked Israel. Recent events, however, have shown their capacity to regroup, stir chaos and gain Iran leverage.

Still, analysts do not consider the proxy forces — each with its own agenda — mere puppets of Tehran,

IRAN, PAGE 4

DOUBTS DEEPEN ON U.S. CREDIBILITY

As President Trump's war aims shift and munitions run low, allies worry about increasing vulnerability. *PAGE 4*

LAUREN CHINEME/W.W. NORTON & COMPANY

Emily Wilson holding her translation of "The Odyssey." Wilson had said she was "pumped" to see how the tale played out on the big screen, but she has since criticized Christopher Nolan's movie.

A translator ignites an epic movie debate

Emily Wilson's work influenced 'The Odyssey,' but she isn't impressed

BY NEIL VIGDOR

As Christopher Nolan's epic "The Odyssey" closes in on $1 billion in ticket sales at the box office, one of the leading translators of the Homeric tale eviscerated the summer blockbuster as a grandiose and superficial movie that strays from classical interpretations.

The scholar, Emily Wilson, weighing in on Mr. Nolan's big-screen adaptation in The London Review of Books, said she would have been "ashamed to have written any part of this script."

Her 4,000-plus-word takedown of this year's most-talked-about movie appeared to temporarily crash The LRB's website and fueled a debate over balancing commercial success with literary authenticity.

Here's what to know about the controversy:

Who is Emily Wilson?

In 2017, Wilson became the first woman to translate "The Odyssey" from ancient Greek into English, an interpretation widely celebrated in academia and the literary world as comprehensive, modern in sensibilities and faithful to Homer's nearly 3,000-year-old poem.

The project took several years to complete for Wilson, 54, who has published four books on ancient literature, including a 2023 translation of "The Iliad," another epic poem by Homer.

In her translation of "The Odyssey," which was published by W.W. Norton & Company, Wilson departed from the masculine framing used by her male predecessors. She has said on several

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Issue Number
No. 44,595

PAGE TWO

MARTTI PARSSINEN

One of the earthworks documented by scientists in the Amazon rainforest, in Acre, Brazil. The researchers attributed the structures to an ancient society they called the Aquiry.

Evidence of an ancient society

Geometric designs counter idea of Amazon as largely untouched before colonists

BY ALAN YUHAS

Flying over the southwestern Amazon, archaeologists have discovered hundreds of ancient, monumental designs carved into the earth that hint at complex societies in the rainforest a millennium before Spanish and Portuguese colonists arrived.

The research, published last week in the journal Nature, shows circles, squares and other geometric figures, some with connecting roads, beneath the forest canopy, with nearly 400 previously unknown earthworks in all. Many are formations that archaeologists call geoglyphs and date from between 600 B.C. to A.D. 850. All of them add to evidence contradicting the depiction of the Amazon as a largely untouched expanse before the arrival of Europeans in the 15th century.

To see under the dense canopy near the borders of Bolivia, Brazil and Peru, the researchers used a laser-scanning technology called lidar — an acronym for light detection and ranging — which archaeologists and other scholars around the world have used to map sites invisible to the naked eye.

The geoglyphs, shaped by embankments, mounds and trenches, vary in size. Most cover seven acres (nearly three hectares), including many with ditches 30 feet (nine meters) wide and 15 feet deep. The biggest figure sprawls across more than 120 acres.

"This is an important and ambitious study, based on exceptionally extensive lidar coverage for this region, which reveals the remarkable scale of pre-Columbian landscape modification in southwestern Amazonia," said José Iriarte, an archaeologist at the University of Exeter in England who was not involved in the research.

MARTTI PARSSINEN AND FABIO DE NOVAES

To see under the dense canopy of the rainforest, the researchers used a laser-scanning technology called lidar. Above, a lidar image of an earthwork site that was found in Acre.

Further excavation, he said, would be crucial in investigating the geoglyphs, which in many ways remain mysterious, including "how they were used and whether they were associated with residence, ceremonies or other activities."

Drawing in part on oral accounts from the Apurinã nation, the Indigenous group that lives in the center of the earthwork area, the researchers said that the designs had most likely had several purposes.

"We are quite sure that those are used for festivities, political occasions, ceremonies, dance, music and also competition like ball games," said Martti Parssinen, the lead author and an emeritus professor at the University of Helsinki in Finland. The researchers attributed the structures to an ancient society they called the Aquiry, which Dr. Parssinen described as a multicultural, multilingual group that "shared a common cosmology" reflected in these ceremonial centers.

"Nobody has totally figured out" the exact purpose or meaning of the geoglyphs, which may have astronomically related forms, said Anna Roosevelt, a professor of anthropology at the University of Illinois Chicago, who was not on the team.

Dr. Parssinen said the archaeologists had not found any evidence of permanent residence at the mounds from the Aquiry era, which ended around A.D. 900. Nor did they believe that any were meant to be defensive structures.

But the structures, stretching across a zone of 1,700 square miles (4,400 square kilometers), build on evidence that the Amazon basin was widely and densely populated in the centuries before Columbus arrived. Chroniclers like Gaspar de Carvajal, a missionary who traveled the Amazon in the 1540s with the conquistador Francisco de Orellana, described a land "thickly populated" in some places, with many large settlements, including one that "stretched for five leagues without there intervening any space from house to house."

Those accounts were largely dismissed in the centuries that followed, given the crushing toll that disease and colonization took on Indigenous people. Scientists who followed also struggled to see how large or complex societies could develop without European-style agriculture, contributing to a false idea that the Amazon was a pristine forest, rather than one where the population was almost wiped out.

"Archaeologists find all of these things that are not supposed to be found in Amazonia, and it's not because Amazonia is different in terms of the soil but how you use the forest," Dr. Roosevelt said.

Recent work in other parts of the Amazon has found the traces of roads, canals, plazas and residential platforms, including in eastern Ecuador. Dr. Parssinen's team estimated that there may be thousands more earthworks in the region, and noted that the rainforest remains so dense in some places that even lasers could not pierce the foliage.

In other places, scientists warned, deforestation for agriculture may have damaged or destroyed sites. "This heritage is highly threatened by logging and soybean farming," said Eduardo Neves, an archaeologist at the University of São Paulo in Brazil, who was not on the team.

Dr. Parssinen's team also suggested that at the peak of Aquiry society, between A.D. 100-300, the total population of just this region may have reached up to three million people.

Population estimates are a subject of intense and sometimes thorny debate among researchers, and some experts said that the latest study's proposal should be treated with caution.

But most scientists now hold that the 16th-century accounts of dense populations were not as far-fetched as many generations believed.

"They thought that it was imagination of Carvajal and the expedition of Orellana, which saw really huge settlements," Dr. Parssinen said.

A translator ignites an epic movie debate

ODYSSEY, FROM PAGE 1

occasions that the decision has subjected her to online harassment and misogyny from men and far-right figures who object to her translation.

While promoting his blockbuster movie, Nolan mentioned Wilson's translation of "The Odyssey" as one of his influences.

Wilson is department chairwoman of Classical studies at the University of Pennsylvania and was recognized as a 2019 MacArthur fellow for "bringing classical literature to new audiences in works that convey ancient texts' relevance to our time." She studied at Oxford University in England and Yale in Connecticut.

What did Wilson say about Nolan's adaptation?

Five days before the movie "The Odyssey" had its premiere, Wilson, appearing on a July 12 episode of "The Daily," the podcast of The New York Times, said she was "pumped" to see how the tale played out on the big screen.

"I mean, it's going to be exciting that so many people who may have thought, Oh, ancient literature is boring, or it's not for me, or it's too inaccessible, are then going to realize, actually, this is a really compelling story," Wilson said. "And some proportion of the people who go to the movie will then turn back to the original poem, which I think is great. I love that."

Asked about purists potentially taking exception to Nolan's artistic choices, Wilson said it would not be the first time that Homeric poems were adapted for performance.

"I think it's totally fine and valid for a director to explore his own vision," she said of Nolan.

But after she saw the movie, the criticism began: Wilson wrote that Nolan's adaptation lacked many of the elements that made the poem great.

"It has nothing convincing to say about time, memory, history, war, or about the relationship between one warrior's glorious return and the lives of his family, adversaries, comrades, friends and neighbours," she wrote. "It lacks psychological, emotional, political and ethical depth. Its narrative structure is gimmicky. The writing is abysmal."

Wilson argued that the movie embraced style over substance.

"It's a family-friendly audiovisual spectacle, like an elaborate Fourth of July fireworks display — and with about the same level of narrative and emotional depth," she wrote.

Nolan's casting choices also drew criticism from Wilson.

"Most of the non-white actors — Zendaya, Lupita Nyong'o, Himesh Patel, Corey Antonio Hawkins, Travis Scott — play versions of the Black best friend, whose only role in the drama is to provide aid to the white protagonist," she wrote.

On Wednesday, Wilson expressed regret on Bluesky over how she had presented that criticism.

"In this piece, I regret the paragraph about the uses of the POC actors — who are all great, but IMO underutilized (and why couldn't Himesh Patel be Odysseus instead?)," she wrote. "I still think the film largely wastes its strong cast, but I framed it badly."

What was the response to Wilson's criticisms?

Nolan, whose "Oppenheimer" won seven Academy Awards in 2024, including for best picture and best director, has not responded publicly to Wilson's scathing review.

Among those who have pushed back against Wilson's criticism and in Nolan's defense are the novelist Joyce Carol Oates, a retired professor of the humanities at Princeton University in New Jersey and a National Book Award winner.

"Yes, her tone of dismissal & haughty superiority strike a sour note," Oates wrote on X. "Rather than disagreeing with interpretations of Homer in a collegial manner, this person, who has benefited enormously from Nolan's film, speaks in the crude language of MAGA folks attacking someone with ideas that differ from hers."

Oates said she would have expected a translator, whose role she described as having subjectivity, to be more tolerant.

How do other scholars feel?

In an online commentary for Slate, Theo Nash, who has published on the textual history of "The Odyssey," accused Wilson of using "baffling arguments" to "flay" Nolan's latest movie.

The article was titled: "I'm a Classicist. Were Emily Wilson and I Watching the Same Odyssey Movie?"

Nash said Nolan was entitled to artistic interpretation.

"Wilson is naturally at her best when discussing the poem itself: This is a work to which she has dedicated years of her life, and she knows it intimately," Nash wrote. "But too often she simply criticizes Nolan for deviating from it, as if the filmmaker's choices were not also an act of interpretation. The close attention to the text that informs Wilson's translation is lacking in her reading of the movie, and the idea that Nolan might have something new to say about 'The Odyssey' is denied."

Daniel Mendelsohn, a professor of humanities at Bard College in upstate New York whose own translation of "The Odyssey" was published last year by the University of Chicago Press, wrote in The New York Review of Books that the most authentic thing about the movie was its "densely braided narrative," while the "tormented hero sounds like the heroes of Christopher Nolan movies."

"Whatever his lifelong fascination with the epic, Nolan has merely remade Homer's hero in his own image, just as he has imposed on Odysseus's adventures values utterly foreign to Homer," Mendelsohn wrote.

MELINDA SUE GORDON/UNIVERSAL PICTURES, VIA UNIVERSAL PICTURES VIA AP

Matt Damon, center, as Odysseus in "The Odyssey." "It's a family-friendly audiovisual spectacle, like an elaborate Fourth of July fireworks display," Emily Wilson wrote of the movie.

Mexico unveils a $115 million plan to clean up its coast

PAOLA CHOMANTE/REUTERS

A type of stinky seaweed known as sargassum covering the shoreline of a beach in Puerto Morelos, Mexico, last month.

MEXICO CITY

Stinky, brown seaweed is plaguing the region, putting off some tourists

BY DAVID SHORTELL

President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico has unveiled a $115 million plan to combat one of the most pernicious threats to the nation's crucial tourism industry: a record-breaking scourge of seaweed that is spoiling vacations up and down Mexico's prized Caribbean coast.

The plan centers on two 200-foot (60-meter) ships that can haul in more than three tons of seaweed a minute and that will trawl the open seas off Mexico's east coast, Ms. Sheinbaum said during her daily news conference on Thursday. Mexico's Navy will also install more than 30 miles (48 kilometers) of containment barriers to trap the seaweed as it nears the shore. And hundreds of workers from the military, as well as hotels and local governments, will use heavy machinery and pitchforks to heave off the mess that makes it through.

The seaweed — a stinky, brown algae known as sargassum — has plagued Mexico and the broader region for more than a decade, but this year's forecast is setting records. Up to 9,000 tons of sargassum arrive each day to the coast of Quintana Roo, the Mexican state that includes the tourist hot spots Cancún and Tulum, according to environmental officials. That is four times the amount that washed up per day last year and 27 times the historic daily average.

The scope of the plan shows how big a threat the seaweed poses to the Mexican economy. Tourists have been complaining and, in some cases, changing plans because of the onslaught of seaweed, threatening revenues that account for nearly 9 percent of Mexico's economy.

One study published this year estimated that the presence of sargassum on a beach was associated with a roughly 11 percent decline in local economic activity, with negative effects persisting for up to 12 months after the seaweed was first detected.

Ms. Sheinbaum has portrayed the effort as an urgent priority, touring the affected area by helicopter last month and bringing out her top military and science officials on Thursday for the hourlong presentation.

The region's stretch of powdery sand beaches and turquoise water amounts to Mexico's most important tourist destination, and high season, when millions of visitors from around the world plan to arrive, begins in the fall.

"The effort so far has been titanic, but we have to do more to prevent sargassum from reaching the beaches," Ms. Sheinbaum said.

Since 2011, shifting wind patterns have carried sargassum outside of its natural home in the North Atlantic — where it serves as a habitat and source of food for marine species — to the south, where chemical agricultural runoff from Africa and Brazil have helped fuel its growth. Rising ocean temperatures caused by climate change have also helped increase the speed at which it grows, scientists believe.

President Claudia Sheinbaum of Mexico has portrayed the effort as an urgent priority.

When ocean currents and winds carry the bloom onto shore, it layers into thick, unsightly mounds that smother wildlife and, as they decompose, release gas that makes the beach smell like a sewer. With prolonged exposure, the gases — primarily hydrogen sulfide and ammonia — can be harmful to humans.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends staying away from areas where sargassum is decomposing.

The decomposing seaweed can also turn the surrounding water a murky brown — a phenomenon known as a brown tide, which causes underwater oxygen levels to plunge, killing off scores of fish.

The Mexican effort is focused on capturing more of the seaweed at sea, before it becomes a problem for vacationers. One ship, which can hold up to 200 tons of the seaweed, is already operating in the Caribbean Sea, according to Raymundo Pedro Morales Ángeles, Mexico's navy secretary. The second, with a capacity for 700 tons, is currently at a port on Mexico's Pacific Coast, waiting to cross the Panama Canal, and it is expected to join the fight in a month, Mr. Morales Ángeles said.

The ships are modified roll-on, roll-off vessels, which are typically used to move cars between international ports like a floating garage.

Off the front of the ships, the Mexican Navy has installed a collection system consisting of four bands that lower into the ocean to catch seaweed, moving in a continuous loop "like the endless chains of a tortilla-making machine," Mr. Morales Ángeles said.

The navy is also deploying smaller boats towing nets to collect seaweed closer to shore, and it will contribute more than 300 soldiers to dispose of the seaweed on land.

Clearing sargassum from about a yard of sandy beach can cost a hotel as much as $60 a month — a figure that can add up, considering the lengthy shorelines of some beachfront properties, according to Roberto Cintrón, a former president of a local hotel association.

At Oasis Hotels & Resorts, a collection of all-inclusive properties in Cancún's popular hotel zone, it takes nearly 200 people working round-the-clock shifts to churn through the daily onslaught, said Jesús Almaguer, the company's commercial director and another former association chief.

Speaking at the news conference on Thursday, Iván Chávez, the executive vice president of the Mexican luxury resort developer Grupo Vidanta, said the investment was "the most comprehensive response to sargassum in the world."

Beyond Mexico, sargassum blooms have washed ashore across the Caribbean and in South Florida this year, clogging beaches in Miami and causing fish to die en masse in the Florida Keys. In the Dominican Republic, which is experiencing its own record sargassum season, officials have discussed purchasing a Mexican sargassum-collecting ship, said Alicia Bárcena Ibarra, Mexico's environment secretary.

An international summit meeting, expected to include leaders from the Caribbean and Brazil, is planned for October in Cancún, Ms. Bárcena said.

Ricardo Hernández Ruiz contributed reporting.

World

Forestry rules were ignored ahead of wildfire

PARIS

Lapses may have helped France's biggest blaze in decades to spread further

BY CATHERINE PORTER, SÉGOLÈNE LE STRADIC AND SAMUEL GRANADOS

After fires tore through forests outside Bordeaux in 2022, President Emmanuel Macron of France called on rural villages to finally enforce long-ignored forestry rules meant to prevent such a vast blaze in the future.

Among other requirements, residents in that region were instructed to clear all bushes and prune low-hanging tree branches within 50 meters, or roughly 54 yards, of their homes, making it harder for fires to reach the villages. Mayors were meant to issue fines of roughly $860 to those who didn't comply.

Four years to the month later, officials have rarely ensured that residents adhere to those rules in the forests west of Bordeaux, according to the president of a union of forest owners, four local mayors, two experts and a New York Times analysis of satellite imagery of 23 evacuated villages. Many residents did not clear vegetation near their homes because they could not afford the cost and because they did not own the land in question, according to the mayors.

The experts said that lapse may be among the reasons that another fire tore so easily through villages in the region last month, spurring the largest peacetime evacuation in French history.

The fire, France's biggest in decades, burned more than 42,000 hectares, more than 100,000 acres, and destroyed at least 240 houses.

Prosecutors said the fire's initial spark came from a brush-clearing machine, used by contractors for an electricity company on the outskirts of one town, Saumos. The authorities have announced no firm conclusions about why the fire then spread so fast.

In general, such fires are occurring more often and becoming more intense, scientists say, because the burning of fossil fuels has made hotter temperatures more likely. In turn, that dries out the landscape, making it easier for fires to spread. For the first time in France, this fire became so hot that it created a rare weather phenomenon known as a fire cloud, which made the blaze even harder to contain, officials said.

In this case, The New York Times found that flawed landscape and forest management in the Bordeaux region had most likely added to the risks. Those flaws included:

- Across the 23 towns evacuated during the fire, scores of homes had vegetation close to houses, The Times found.
- Firefighters sent to quell the blaze have found themselves battling fires in vegetation that had been allowed to grow next to buildings, according to the national firefighters' union.

JULIEN DE ROSA/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

ED JONES/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

The wildfire in southwestern France has destroyed at least 240 houses and spurred the largest peacetime evacuation in French history. Above, smoke rising near Lège-Cap-Ferret. Right, destruction in Le Porge, where 185 houses burned in recent days.

- Nationally, more than 60 percent of French properties don't comply with the state regulations, according to Christophe Chantepy, a fire expert at the National Forests Office, citing visits that officials make to roughly 10,000 properties each year.

"There were very few actual changes made after 2022," said Arthur Guérin-Turcq, an academic at the Sorbonne University in Paris, who wrote his doctoral thesis on the aftermath of the 2022 fires and grew up in the area. His relatives fled their cottage after the fire broke out about nine miles (14 kilometers) away.

"There were no new fuel breaks or land management adjustments, and very few new firebreaks were created," he said.

"WE ALL FELL A BIT SHORT"

The forest west of Bordeaux, called Landes de Gascogne, sprawls across roughly three million acres, filling the southwest corner of France. It was planted in the 1850s after Napoleon III ordered regional swamps drained and pines seeded, for both his government and private landowners to use. Since then, it's become Europe's largest commercial forest, with tens of thousands of landowners harvesting the pines for paper, cardboard and wood.

In 2022, fires broke out in two places in the forest, burning through 80,000 acres. That disaster caused the government to adapt its firefighting strategy for the climate-change era and double down on its brush-clearing regulations.

But few have been enforced.

Bruno Lafon, the mayor of Biganos, a town roughly 12 miles south of where this summer's fire started, estimated that only 20 percent of residents with land abutting the forest had followed the rules, despite his repeated messages and annual meetings about them.

In the nearby town of Lanton, where 15 homes burned down this week, Mayor Loïc Ballongue estimated the rate was between 10 and 20 percent.

"I think we all fell a bit short," Mr. Ballongue said.

Many firefighters were frustrated to find uncleared brush ablaze right next to homes, said Éric Brocardi, a veteran firefighter and spokesman for the national union, who had spent two days meeting with firefighters on the ground.

"We're putting firefighters in harm's way because there are houses that need defending but haven't taken steps to make themselves defendable," he said. "Honestly, we're even asking ourselves if, in the future, firefighters are going to put their lives on the line for houses that haven't followed legal brush-clearing rules?"

Some mayors say it's unfair to blame homeowners for the lack of enforcement, since residents often don't own the land that they're expected to clear. More than 90 percent of the forests are owned privately, by 150,000 small and big landowners, according to Stéphane Latour, the regional director of a state-funded forestry agency.

Some villagers also can't afford the price of clearing brush, which can cost thousands of euros annually.

Olivier Halard, the mayor of Le Temple, another town damaged by the fire, said the regulations were too weak and that the state should organize the clearance of all trees and brush within at least 50 meters of homes.

Still, Mr. Chantepy, the fire expert, said it made sense to expect homeowners to pay for the tree felling, because the houses were often built long after the forest was seeded.

"The forest owner didn't ask for a house to be built next to his forest," he said.

Also, it was in the homeowner's interest to follow the law, he said. In 90 percent of post-fire inspections in the past two decades, forestry agents found that the areas around burned houses had not been properly cleared.

"NO ADEQUATE FIREBREAKS"

According to some experts, the installation of more buffer zones near villages would have achieved only so much. Just as problematic was the failure to erect more firebreaks in areas of the vast forest that are far from human habitation.

Bad storms in 1999 and 2009 destroyed large plantation blocks in the forest, leading foresters to fill the gaps by planting many new pines.

That created large, contiguous blocks of trees of the same age and size — without open spaces and breaks in the landscape that help prevent fires from spreading, according to a 2023 report from France's top auditing institution.

"It's truly as if they were matches stuck in the ground, and as soon as the fire hits the bottom, it climbs right up to the top," Mr. Guérin-Turcq said.

After the 2022 fires, Mr. Macron said that more fire breaks should be built in the forest, "especially when fire is a risk — which is to say, almost everywhere."

That, experts, landowners and mayors said, has not happened.

For example, between Saumos, where the fire started, and Le Porge, where 185 houses burned in recent days, "There were no adequate firebreaks to slow down the fire," Mr. Guérin-Turcq said.

According to Mr. Lafon, the process has been hampered by administrative roadblocks, objections from environmentalists and forest owners themselves.

Even during the current fires, the local authorities took two days to approve the cutting of a new network of firebreaks, according to Mr. Lafon. The local prefecture did not respond to requests for comment.

The longer-term solution, experts like Mr. Guérin-Turcq said, is to break up the forest with different kinds of land use.

"The real question is: Can we do something other than forestry in the Landes forest? Couldn't we also bring in more agriculture or pastoral farming?" he said. "We need to step away from monoculture to better protect the forest. And that is the crux of the problem."

Giulia Imbert contributed reporting from Paris and Jason Horowitz from Madrid.

Exhausted migrants in Ceuta find shelter on a beach

CEUTA, SPAIN

Most arrivals last week returned to Morocco, but some are vowing to stay

BY CARLOS BARRAGÁN

Sitting on a beach on Saturday in Ceuta, Spain, a Senegalese man called Djibril Mboup pulled a bag of pistachios from his pocket and began rationing them, one by one, among his newly made friends. The bag, given to him by a Spanish police officer, contained the only food, he said, that he had eaten in the nearly two days since he had entered this Spanish territory in North Africa.

Yet despite his hunger, Mr. Mboup, 30, said he was not going to return across the border to Morocco.

"I speak for everyone here," Mr. Mboup said, raising his voice as the young men around him murmured in agreement. "Even if we don't eat, even if we don't drink, we are not going back to Morocco. We are staying here."

Mr. Mboup was among roughly 400 men, most of them from sub-Saharan Africa, who were gathered on this beach on Saturday. Many of them lay on ragged sheets of cardboard, their feet blistered from crossing the border and roaming Ceuta's streets.

By late Saturday, the fate of this group had become an unresolved question for Spain's government in the short term after at least 50,000 people, mostly young Moroccan men, crossed into Ceuta on Thursday and Friday, overwhelming the city of just 84,000 residents.

Most of those arrivals had left by Saturday morning, returning to their homes in Morocco after they realized that there was little for them in Spain. The 400 men on the beach were among the last holdouts, and for them the crisis was far from over.

With few prospects in Morocco, they waited anxiously on the beach for news about their future in Spain, under the watchful eyes of Spanish police officers. Some were so exhausted they did not react when people stepped over them. Mr. Mboup was so tired it took him a moment to remember which day he had arrived in Spain.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FINBARR O'REILLY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Above left, some migrants were waiting it out on a beach in Ceuta, Spain, on Saturday after crossing from Morocco days earlier. They were among at least 50,000 people who crossed into Ceuta on Thursday and Friday. Above right, residents confronted a far-right Spanish politician who had traveled to Ceuta to call for the expulsion of the migrants.

Anti-immigrant, far-right campaigners were set to hold a rally on Sunday in Ceuta, demanding the expulsion of all of the remaining migrants. The arrival of far-right activists and politicians in the city has provoked an angry reaction from some residents, many of them of Moroccan descent.

"The situation is very difficult," said Ramsés Mohamed, an activist from a local humanitarian organization, who had come to the beach to tell the migrants about their rights. He warned that if the government did not provide food, "a humanitarian crisis could begin to unfold."

The fate of some of the holdouts "is not the same as that of the Moroccans," Mr. Mohamed, 26, said. Unlike Moroccans who had joined the exodus to Ceuta on a last-minute whim, some of the sub-Saharan migrants are from war-torn regions and had journeyed for months to get to Europe.

"They genuinely have the right to request international protection," Mr. Mohamed said.

Minutes later, a man wearing official credentials arrived at the beach to address the migrants. Dozens surrounded him and began chanting cheerfully, "A-si-lo, a-si-lo" — "asylum, asylum" — in the hope that he had the power to help grant them sanctuary.

Some of the recent arrivals have opted to go into hiding. On Saturday, small groups of Moroccans were making for the hills around the city, and others were concealing themselves in the bushes. Here and there, police officers gave chase.

For those on the beach, the best possible outcome as they navigated the complexities of the European Union's asylum system was to be transferred to the city's official migrant reception center. But on Saturday, that appeared unlikely, at least for now: It was already overcrowded with hundreds of people, even before this crisis began.

David Cebrián, a spokesman for Spain's Migration Ministry, said that officials were working to assist those already at the reception center and were "strengthening" its capacity "to provide an adequate, coordinated and effective humanitarian response to this extraordinary situation."

"A humanitarian crisis could begin to unfold."

Mr. Mboup grew up in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, earning a diploma in logistics, he said. After struggling to find work in his early 20s, he decided to leave the country in 2018 and made his way to Morocco by navigating the deadly smuggling routes through the Sahara. He settled in Casablanca, a coastal city, where he scraped by working illegally as a taxi driver at the airport.

Until this past week, Mr. Mboup had never tried to cross into Europe, thinking it would be too dangerous.

On Thursday morning, Mr. Mboup said, his friend told him she had seen posts on WhatsApp saying that the usually heavily guarded border between Morocco and Ceuta was open, and she suggested that they go. He initially dismissed the reports as a hoax.

When a food vendor in Casablanca told him that he, too, was heading to the border, Mr. Mboup changed his mind. If Moroccans believed it was true, he thought, then it must be.

"Let's pack and go," Mr. Mboup recalled telling the friend.

They hired a van, he said, and drove with several friends 200 miles (320 kilometers) to the border, to find thousands of people gathered there. For hours, they tried unsuccessfully to find a way across on foot because, unlike Mr. Mboup, his friends did not know how to swim, he said.

As night fell, Mr. Mboup told his friends that he would try his luck alone, he said. But he was still afraid to do so because he feared how the Moroccan police would react, he said. According to Mr. Mboup and other sub-Saharan Africans, Moroccan police officers tried to prevent Black people from crossing the border on Thursday, even as they encouraged Moroccans to head for Ceuta.

"Only Moroccans could enter," said Kamal Omar, 24, another new arrival, who said he fled war-torn Sudan three years ago. "When they saw a Black man, they hit him."

The Moroccan government did not respond to requests for comment.

Institutions including Human Rights Watch and the U.S. State Department have reported similar accusations in the past. In response, the Moroccan government has previously said that its border guards act in "self-defense" and that their "use of force is generally a reaction to violence suffered by law enforcement officers."

Mr. Mboup said he had joined a group of Moroccans swimming toward Ceuta and reached the Spanish shore after roughly 30 minutes.

His happiness quickly gave way to disappointment, he said.

"I kept looking for signs toward Madrid and Barcelona," he said, only to realize that he was still "on an island" and that mainland Europe was far away.

Then came another setback. The residents of Ceuta had shuttered their shops. By Friday evening, most of the Moroccan migrants had returned home. That mainly left the group of sub-Saharan Africans who seemed determined to stay despite having nothing to eat. Rather than forcing them out, the Spanish authorities directed them to this beach in the city's northwest, close to the migrant reception center.

By Saturday, those holdouts seemed caught between two bad options.

"We are very, very hungry," Mr. Mboup said. "I appeal to the good will of Spaniards — we need help."

Lynsey Chutel contributed reporting from London, and Finbarr O'Reilly from Ceuta.

WORLD

How Iran and its proxies plotted wider war

IRAN, FROM PAGE 1

though Iran's level of coordination and control varies among them.

The Houthis in Yemen, for instance, are seen as the most autonomous of the groups that make up the alliance. Hezbollah coordinates the most closely with Iran, while Shiite militias in Iraq are somewhere in the middle in the degree of their willingness to act as a direct arm of Iran.

But the groups still find common cause against the United States and Israel. During the short-lived cease-fire, Iranian generals covertly strategized with proxy militia commanders on how to expand the war and raise its cost for Washington, according to the two officials, both familiar with the planning as members of the Guards, and both speaking anonymously to discuss sensitive internal deliberations.

Senior commanders from the Quds Force, the external arm of the Guards that fosters proxy militias, held virtual conference calls with commanders from Hezbollah, the Houthis and Shiite armed groups in Iraq, the officials said.

Quds Force commanders and advisers have also been working closely with the militias on the ground, according to the two officials. The Guards have tried to fill the void in Hezbollah's ranks, which have been decimated by war with Israel, while also serving in Iraq on bases operated by Shiite militias.

A wave of U.S.-Saudi airstrikes targeted militias in Iraq early Wednesday, and Iranian media published photographs of four men killed in the attacks, all wearing the distinctive olive uniforms of the Quds Force, their coffins draped with Iran's flag.

"We are playing a grand game of chess; the militias are Iran's chess pieces to be moved wisely at the right time and place, for maximum impact," Mehdi Rahmati, an analyst in Iran and an expert on the regional militias, said in a phone interview.

The attacks have been calibrated to avoid direct confrontations with U.S. or Israeli forces, which could lead to harsh retaliation against Iran, analysts said. Igniting a fire at the Saudi oil facility drew the kingdom into the war, but the Saudi response targeted Iraqi militias accused of the attack rather than Iran.

Iran mobilized its proxy forces for a variety of reasons, analysts said. First and foremost, the strategy aims to limit oil exports from the region, driving up gas prices in the United States ahead of the U.S. midterm elections and reducing revenue for Washington's Arab allies.

Tehran senses that severe economic damage might make its neighbors more amenable to Iran's ambition to control all traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, analysts said. About 20 percent of the world's oil supply transited the strait before the war.

"Iran thinks that its neighbors are vulnerable," said Afshon Ostovar, the author of a history of the Middle East in the 21st century. "They are basically just trying to twist the arm of the Saudis and gain some concessions."

HADI MIZBAN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Above, mourners carrying a coffin draped in the Iranian flag during a funeral on Wednesday for those killed in airstrikes on bases belonging to militias in Mosul, Iraq. Below from left: Houthi supporters during an anti-Saudi rally in Sanaa, Yemen, on Friday; and smoke rising from a village in southern Lebanon last month after an Israeli attack.

KHALED ABDULLAH/REUTERS

IBRAHIM AMRO/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

With its oil exports largely blocked in the Strait of Hormuz, Saudi Arabia has been shipping much of its oil through a pipeline across the kingdom. It is then exported out of a Red Sea port and through the Bab al-Mandab, the narrow strait separating Yemen from Africa.

The Houthis, who had largely sat on the sidelines after the United States and Israel attacked Iran, announced a naval blockade against Saudi shipping on July 20 and began missile and drone attacks to enforce it.

Then another, far longer route to Asia, through the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean, came under threat on Wednesday as drones hit tankers in Egypt — opening a new front. Iran rejected accusations that it was responsible.

The Houthis have their own reasons for putting pressure on their neighbor, Saudi Arabia, especially finding an end to Yemen's long-running civil war, in which the kingdom had played a devastating role.

"They are coordinating with Iran, but they are not necessarily acting on behalf of Iran," said Firas Maksad, the managing director for the Middle East and North Africa at Eurasia Group, a risk consultancy. "It's a calibrated escalation and it's part of this negotiation by fire that is ongoing between the Houthis and the Saudis."

Another reason that Iran's allies are attacking is more ideological, analysts said. Iran developed its proxy network with two primary goals: to help drive the United States military out of the region and inflict harm on Israel, and to use the militias as a shield against attacks on Iran itself.

Hezbollah, once Iran's powerful partner on Israel's doorstep, feels newly threatened by an Israeli-Lebanese peace deal, brokered by Washington in June, that includes the unlikely goal of disarming the militia. The group has been attempting to rebuild after war with Israel, which assassinated the militia's longtime leader and killed thousands of foot soldiers.

"The fronts are multiplying from different directions in the region; they are of course coordinated but act independently."

Iran has tried to buttress those efforts, deploying Revolutionary Guards commanders to serve directly on Hezbollah's leadership council, according to both Lebanese government officials and analysts. Senior Lebanese officials have expressed surprise that Iranian commanders turned out to be longstanding residents of buildings that Israel attacked far from traditional Hezbollah strongholds.

"One of the unintended consequences of destroying or degrading Hezbollah's leadership is that the I.R.G.C. is now even more effectively in control of Hezbollah and its actions," Mr. Maksad said.

Similar conditions hold true for Iraq, where a dizzying patchwork of militias emerged after the American invasion in 2003. At the urging of Washington, Iraq has been incorporating militias into its armed forces, but some smaller groups are resisting.

Unleashing Hezbollah and the Iraqi militias is an effort by Iran to thwart such American efforts. "They see that their footprint is diminishing, and they want to reaffirm their presence in the region and their regional role," said Randa Slim, the head of the Middle East program for the Stimson Center in Washington.

Although the various militias have their own reasons for attacking, there is a unity of purpose, analysts said — and a shared sense that Mr. Trump and his Arab allies are reluctant to pursue war, leaving Tehran and its proxies with an opportunity.

"They see a moment," Mr. Ostovar said. "They smell blood in the water, and they are pushing their advantage."

Hwaida Saad and Francesca Regalado contributed reporting.

Mideast conflict deepens doubts about U.S. credibility

NEWS ANALYSIS
BERLIN

Allies are concerned as Trump's war aims shift and munitions run low

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

To America's allies, President Trump's war in Iran, now in its sixth month, seems headed for a strategic defeat.

They worry that the inability of the United States to turn military superiority into a sustainably changed Iran has displayed a vulnerability that Russia and China will welcome. In addition, Mr. Trump's goals remain unmet, and the U.S. military is running short on key armaments that it needs for global reach.

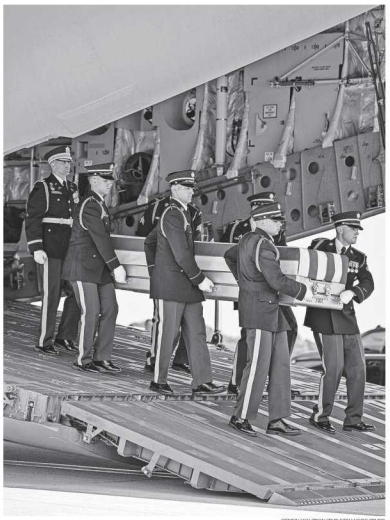
For the moment, Iran is seemingly resolute under a more radical government, its nuclear and ballistic missile programs are degraded but not destroyed, and the Strait of Hormuz is effectively under its control. The war has left both the United States and Israel in weaker positions — and blaming each other for the mess.

Iranian missiles and drones not only restrict traffic through the strait and damage the economic infrastructure of allied energy production, but they also continue to threaten American bases across the Middle East and have killed or injured American service members.

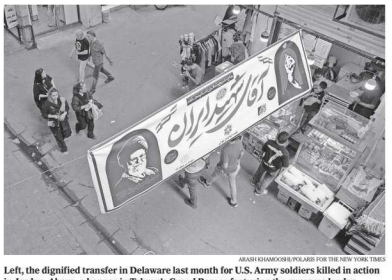
With Mr. Trump's aims shifting, Washington is losing credibility both militarily and diplomatically, analysts said. Its conduct in the war underscores the impression that the United States is an unpredictable instrument of global disorder, they said.

The war may evolve, but so far the result has been "a strategic loss and an embarrassment," said Robin Niblett, a former director of Chatham House, a think tank in London. "For U.S. allies and those who rely on the U.S. for security, this is confirmation that you can't trust the United States."

Even if the Islamic Republic collapses, he added, "people won't forget that their security and their future were dragged into question by an unpredictable and wavering U.S. foreign policy."



KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES



ARASH KHAMOOSHI/POLARIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Left, the dignified transfer in Delaware last month for U.S. Army soldiers killed in action in Jordan. Above, a banner in Tehran's Grand Bazaar featuring the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in an airstrike at the start of the U.S.-Iran war.

European allies remember Mr. Trump's vow to seize Greenland from a NATO ally and his threats to leave the alliance unless other allies met his spending goals. Middle Eastern allies see their own security undermined by this war, even if they are too committed to Washington to abandon partnerships with the United States. But they are already hedging, looking for repaired ties with Iran and better relations with Europe, China and Russia, said Ali Vaez, the Iran project director for the International Crisis Group.

Many countries disliked the global order as it was, Mr. Niblett said, but there was one. "Now America has confirmed itself as a force of disorder and everyone is drawing lessons from it, and trying to be less dependent," he said. "No one wants to be subject to a whipsaw foreign policy that doesn't know its limits, and that is a strategic defeat."

Mr. Vaez cited other recent developments as evidence that the United States has lost credibility as a guarantor of allies' security, including Mr. Trump's abrupt change of demands on July 23 after announcing a landmark nuclear agreement with Saudi Arabia.

"The Saudis do a nuclear deal with Trump that he walks back in 24 hours," Mr. Vaez said. "This is the crisis of credibility of the U.S. Neither its military prowess nor its diplomatic promises can be trusted."

Mr. Trump has argued that it is vital to prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon and that it will eventually cede to superior force. Eventually, he said on Friday, he expects Iran to realize it can't take any more punishment and will negotiate on U.S. terms.

His comments came as the scope of cyberattacks on U.S. water systems had grown to include at least seven states and the authorities raced to safeguard the nation's water supply against an assault that increasingly appeared to be the work of Iran.

While there were no indications that any water supply had been altered or made unsafe to drink, officials were on high alert for potential problems in vulnerable computers that are used to monitor and adjust water quality.

World War II left the United States stronger at home and with more influence abroad. But since then, America's military record has been a mixed bag. Enemies more willing to suffer the pain and expense of conflict, as in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, outlasted the United States.

"Now America has confirmed itself as a force of disorder."

This war in Iran may turn out similarly, with Washington finding a sufficient reason to cut its losses and go home.

Already, the conflict "has undermined U.S. deterrence and credibility, antagonized America's allies and delighted its adversaries," said Aaron David Miller, a former American negotiator and now a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "And if the Strait of Hormuz falls under Iran's leverage and control, it will constitute nothing less than a strategic defeat."

A severe shortage in crucial air-defense munitions like Patriot missiles is having a secondary effect in Ukraine and showing Russia and China — as well as NATO — that the United States will be less capable for years to both resupply its allies and fight a lengthy war.

The war has also badly damaged the vital alliance between the United States and Israel, said François Heisbourg, a French security analyst. American officials including Vice President JD Vance have suggested that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel was overly optimistic while convincing Mr. Trump that the war would be quick and decisive.

Added to already negative views of Israel and Jews more generally stemming from the conflict with Hamas in Gaza, which some call genocide, this war has increased antisemitism in the United States and beyond, some polls show.

The most important negotiation now, Mr. Heisbourg and Mr. Vaez agreed, is between Iran and Oman over control of the Strait of Hormuz, which both countries border. Iran wants sole control over the strait's northern route and shared control over the southern route, which would give it an effective veto over traffic, Mr. Vaez said. While Oman, which Iran is convinced is influenced by Saudi Arabia and the United States, argues for a voluntary fee for passage, Iran is demanding a compulsory one.

"This may be the end of the law of the sea as we've known it," said Mr. Heisbourg. Freedom of the seas has been an American vital interest from its founding, he noted, but it is now at risk.

But even decision makers in Iran who favor further negotiations with the United States are losing confidence that Mr. Trump will be able to keep to any deal over the Strait of Hormuz or anything else, argued Esfandyar Batmanghelidj of the Bourse & Bazaar Foundation, a research institution focused on economic diplomacy.

"Iranian leaders have become intensely pessimistic about what diplomacy with the Trump administration can achieve," he said. He noted that many of them view Mr. Trump as erratic and have a hard time seeing how they could reach a deal with the United States when it has undercut its own allies.

Dustin Volz and Ernesto Londoño contributed reporting.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LISETTE POOLE GONZÁLEZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Playing dominoes during a power outage in Havana. To preserve its energy supply, the Cuban government strategically cuts power at certain times and in certain places.

Cut off, Cubans are keeping on

CUBA, FROM PAGE 1

berto Palmero, a 55-year-old farmer, standing on the hill where he grew up along Cuba's coastline, with a view toward Florida. His siblings had already left for Miami and his two children were fleeing to Spain, but he said he was determined to stay.

After hearing about the oil blockade, Mr. Palmero learned on YouTube how to distill junk plastic into homemade gasoline and diesel. He has since built a tiny, makeshift refinery in his backyard to power his motorcycle and light his stove.

"We look for solutions," he said. "The economic restrictions are slowly killing us, but we're pulling through with all our might, managing to get by until we see what happens next."

MISERY AND GRIT

In Havana and beyond, the effects of the crisis were clear.

We met families walking two hours for water because government pumps had run out of diesel. Women who had no gas cooked with firewood on the streets. Powerless refrigerators became cabinets. Hitchhikers littered roadsides after the city halted public busing. And dozens of people told us they were simply exhausted after so many sleepless nights in the sweltering heat without fans or air-conditioning.

But we also saw a country that was still functioning.

Vehicles were on the roads — despite black-market gasoline reaching $30 a gallon — because many were electric. Restaurants were open for the few who could afford them, powered by rumbling generators out back. Hospitals, government buildings and the airport had power because they were on protected parts of the grid. Medical clinics, nursing homes and bank branches ran off solar panels donated by China.

Cell service was sometimes working. Televisions showing the World Cup were not hard to find. And even roadside stands were serving cold beer from refrigerators powered by the sun.

But the makeshift energy grid also exposed Cuba's inequality.

The batteries, solar panels and electric vehicles overwhelmingly belong to wealthier Cubans, which usually means those with relatives abroad. Their poorer neighbors often live without power and scrape by with meager pay amid rising inflation.

"The situation here is fine, because the owner can afford to buy solar panels," said Yeny Oliva, 26, a bartender at a restaurant. "But for us, at home, life is awful." On wages of roughly $1 a day, she said, she struggles to buy milk for her 3-year-old daughter and their food spoils quickly without electricity.

Yet she also was grateful for the solar energy. Without power, the restaurant had closed. Then, the owners installed the panels and she was back at work.

While not everyone can afford alternative power sources, their energy has trickled down. In one neighborhood, we saw one of the few families with a generator set up a television in the street so children could watch cartoons.

"We have not reached the point of having a humanitarian crisis precisely because of the strength of our society," Mr. Fernández de Cossío, Cuba's deputy foreign minister, said in Havana's Fidel Castro museum, where the lights were on but the air-conditioning had failed. "The intimate expectation in political circles in the United States was that Cuba could not survive beyond April. And here we are."

SCRAPING THE BARREL

Other than a single Russian oil tanker in March, allies have not been willing to test Washington's effective oil blockade.

Humberto Palmero, top, has learned how to distill junk plastic into homemade gasoline and diesel. "We look for solutions," he said. One such solution is solar energy, center, though solar panels overwhelmingly belong to wealthier Cubans, exposing the island's inequality. Above, people sometimes rely on their neighbors' batteries and generators.

As a result, Cuba has been powering its electric grid solely with domestic oil and gas and a growing network of solar parks sponsored by China. Together, they are enough to support roughly half of Cuban demand, according to Jorge Piñón, who studies Cuban energy at the University of Texas.

To preserve that supply, the government strategically cuts power at certain times and in certain places. It also runs plants at lower capacity to keep them from failing; extracts more natural gas; and even tries to refine sludgy oil residues from the bottom of years-old tanks.

"They are literally scraping the bottom of the barrel," Mr. Piñón said.

Mr. Piñón said he and other analysts had underestimated the Cuban government's resourcefulness when they forecast that it would exhaust its fuel stocks by March. But he was now skeptical of the government's claim in May that the island had run out of fuel. On our trip, it was clear that gasoline and diesel were still circulating.

At least some is coming from the United States. The Trump administration has allowed limited fuel exports to private businesses in Cuba, which has relieved pressure on black-market gas prices. And last month, the U.S. government's first batch of $100 million in aid arrived.

The moves show how the Trump administration exerts power over Cuba, ordering other nations to halt fuel shipments but allowing its own, and then providing aid in response to the resulting crisis. A White House spokeswoman said the Trump administration viewed Cuba as a threat to national security.

Exhausted Cubans told us they were angry at both Havana and Washington. Yet no one said they planned to take to the streets. Aside from banging pots and pans, the Cuban people have hardly staged protests.

"You go out to express your opinion on the street, and they throw you in jail or fine you," said David Hechavarría Gamboa, 24, standing alongside his wife on a darkened street. "I can't put my family at risk."

CHASING DAYLIGHT

When U.S. forces captured Venezuela's leader, Nicolás Maduro, in January, Nelson Vega knew Cuba had a problem. Venezuelan oil had powered Cuba for years.

A month later, Mr. Vega, a 38-year-old entrepreneur, borrowed money from relatives in Florida to buy a Chinese-made electric rickshaw for $4,850. It took 10 hours to charge, and almost immediately, the blackouts made that difficult. So he invested a further $600 to attach solar panels to its roof.

Now he can power the entire battery by parking it in the sun for a day. "To me, this is the future," he said. "We're going to overcome the U.S. blockade."

Once we traveled outside Havana, solar panels proliferated. Cuba's power grid has been decaying in rural areas for years, making blackouts — and solar panels — already common.

We also came across a new field of panels — one of the government's 54 solar parks, most inaugurated since last year and all built with China's help.

Few countries are adopting solar more quickly than Cuba. Solar energy can now meet roughly 10 percent of Cuba's electricity needs, the government says, up from 3 percent at the start of last year. Cuban officials aim to depend fully on renewable energy by 2050.

RUNNING ON FUMES

Perhaps Cuba's hottest product of the moment is a portable lithium battery that can be charged in a few hours and then temporarily power televisions, fans or even refrigerators.

The most popular model costs about $750 in Cuba, sold on social media by Cubans who have imported them from China. That is more than most Cubans make in a year, so most of the batteries are sponsored by relatives abroad.

Other Cubans are electrifying their homes with the gas piped in for cooking and heating water. About 280,000 residences in Havana have such gas lines, and many are connecting them to modified generators designed to run on liquid fuel. Cuba produces the gas domestically, so it is one of the few energy sources not affected by the blockade.

The gas is also cheap, especially for the 120,000 households that pay a flat rate regardless of use. One man said he had been running a generator off gas almost nonstop, and yet was still billed the same 50 pesos, or eight cents, for the month.

On one of our final nights in Havana, we found a bar still full of patrons past midnight, powering its string lights and Latin music with a natural gas generator.

Outside, we met Kiké Rodríguez, 37, founder of a Cuban barbecue business, Manteca, that had expanded during the crisis. He now employed 18 people to cook and deliver pork and plantains to customers across Havana.

"We're the masters of this," he said. "We've been figuring things out our whole lives."

He pointed to the rooftop, where he was finishing a remodel to open his first brick-and-mortar restaurant, he said, powered by the same generator.

"How are things going to play out? Nobody knows," he added. "But when people say the country is going to fall apart, I don't exactly know what they mean."

Diana Karla Hernández and Dariel Pradas contributed reporting.

Undoing plans to boost heat protections at work

WASHINGTON

The Trump administration moves to rewrite rules that would increase oversight

BY SCOTT DANCE

Republicans in Washington are taking steps to roll back federal workplace heat protections as summer temperatures surge.

The Trump administration is moving to rewrite Biden-era rules that would mandate breaks and access to water and shade for workers, in a step businesses lauded but that labor groups said could weaken already limited federal protections. Congress is considering legislation that would go a step further, prohibiting the Labor Department from adopting the Biden-era heat plan or similar rules.

At the same time, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration is curtailing workplace inspections that President Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s appointees had increased to raise awareness of heat-related illnesses.

OSHA officials did not respond to questions about enforcement activity.

The details of the proposed changes might not be known for months. Still, the efforts highlight the divide between labor and industry about what steps to take as the dangers from rising temperatures become more apparent.

The proposed revisions would also reverse momentum toward codifying extreme heat as a workplace hazard. Stretches of record heat have persisted across the United States this summer, punctuating decades of steadily climbing summer temperature highs and more frequent spells of dangerously hot conditions.

OSHA officials did not respond to questions about enforcing the mandate.

Business groups welcomed most of those steps, saying employers are already safeguarding workers from heat. But labor organizations say they fear job sites are becoming more dangerous as oversight declines and immigration enforcement creates an atmosphere of fear in the fields and warehouses where heat is most extreme, which could discourage some employees from raising alarm over conditions.

"They're bringing the work force back to the 1800s," said Trina David, a crew chief at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport who oversees baggage handling and other activity while planes are parked at gates. The temperature in the city often hits triple digits in Fahrenheit in the summer, or over 38 degrees Celsius, and it can be even hotter on the tarmac.

Heat is linked to hundreds of workplace deaths each year, but labor groups say the true toll is unknown because heat-related illnesses are not properly tracked or reported. In 2024, the death toll was at least 530, according to data compiled by the A.F.L.-C.I.O.

On-the-job injuries and deaths typically trigger federal or state workplace safety investigations. But OSHA doesn't have any rules specific to extreme heat, which can make holding employers accountable for dangerously hot working conditions difficult, former agency officials said.

OSHA oversees workplace safety in about half of states; in the others, it delegates those duties to state agencies under plans federal regulators approve. Some states and cities have their own workplace heat protections in place, including California, Oregon and Maryland.

But gaps in worker protections and rising global temperatures driven by climate change prompted the Biden administration to increase federal oversight of workplaces where extreme heat is common. In 2022, OSHA started a program that aimed to double inspections.

From April 2022 to December 2024, the agency conducted about 7,000 workplace inspections related to extreme heat, including 147 investigations into potentially heat-related deaths, according to the agency. OSHA sent nearly 1,400 warning letters to employers and issued 60 citations in that span. It was a significant step up: The agency reported about 200 heat-related inspections a year from 2015 through 2020.

As Mr. Biden's term waned in the summer of 2024, OSHA proposed rules that would require employers to develop heat plans and provide rest areas and water any time the heat index reaches 80 degrees or higher. The Biden administration estimated the rules would cover about 35 million workers.

Many labor and business groups expected that proposal to disappear once President Trump returned to the White House. But the Trump administration carried out a scheduled public hearing on the Biden heat rule proposal in June last year.

Last month, the administration published plans to continue that rule-making process — but with significant revisions planned for release by the end of this year. The measure could become final in 2027.

Employers had raised concerns that the Biden proposal would disrupt their operations, potentially blocking them from designing more effective and tailored heat relief plans.

"The fact that they have something on the agenda is encouraging," said Marc Freedman, vice president of workplace policy for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

But labor groups say an employer-friendly federal rule could not only endanger workers in the states OSHA directly oversees, but also weaken protections in the other states. That could prompt business groups to pressure regulators to scale back or rescind any stronger rules in place at the state or local level, said Debbie Berkowitz, who served as senior policy adviser at OSHA under President Barack Obama.

Separately, the Trump administration has also shifted the approach of the OSHA inspection program started under Mr. Biden. In April, OSHA renewed the initiative, but it stripped away any targets around inspection activity.

That was a significant change, Ms. Berkowitz said, because the program relied on the inspections and potential enforcement to keep employers accountable. And it was designed to provide a key legal framework for OSHA to target heat hazards in specific industries and workplaces, she added.

"Where workers are getting sick or dying on the job due to extreme heat, these are largely low-wage immigrant workers."

It is not clear how the change may be affecting OSHA inspection activity; the agency has not made any recent statistics public.

OSHA has long been stretched thin, said Dennis Spencer, a Philadelphia-based airline worker who serves as a director of safety for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. Under the Trump administration, its availability has not improved, he said.

"If you don't call OSHA, they're not coming in and just looking around," Mr. Spencer said. "I haven't gotten calls where they say, 'OSHA's here looking at the heat standard or the hydration plan.' I don't think they're making random stops."

That means workers have to carry much of the burden of flagging heat dangers, said Oscar Londoño, co-executive director of WeCount!, a human rights organization in South Florida focused on immigrant workers. Doing so is often risky because of fears of retaliation, and it's especially fraught in agriculture and sectors where heat is most intense and where fears of deportation are highest, he said.

"In the industries where workers are getting sick or dying on the job due to extreme heat, these are largely low-wage immigrant workers," Mr. Londoño said.

Labor groups say a strict workplace heat standard is needed to reflect the rising threat that heat poses.

Ms. David, the Phoenix airport worker, said that heat always posed some challenges in her 19-year career. But when she started working at Sky Harbor, the worst summer heat would last three months. In 2024, temperatures hit triple digits on a record 113 consecutive days — and were 20 to 40 degrees higher on the tarmac.

"I get that we signed up for this, but we didn't sign up for the heat to become as severe as it is," she said.

"Everyone's asking workers to adapt to the heat," she added. "Your organs can't adapt that fast. The conditions changed."

ALLISON JOYCE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

A delivery in Wilmington, N.C., last month. Heat is already linked to hundreds of workplace deaths each year, but labor rights groups say the true toll is unknown.

WORLD

In dropping pool case, she incurs Trump's wrath

WASHINGTON

Jeanine Pirro, an ally of the president for decades, is in his sights

BY GLENN THRUSH

TIERNEY L. CROSS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

ELIZABETH FRANTZ/REUTERS

Jeanine Pirro, left, withdrew felony vandalism charges against David Hearn over damage to the Reflecting Pool in Washington. Norman L. Eisen, above, a lawyer for Mr. Hearn, said Ms. Pirro's claim that she was duped over the pool's renovation was "nonsense."

Jeanine Pirro faced the cameras on July 2 with characteristic self-assurance to announce the indictment of the 67-year-old ex-Olympian David Hearn for trashing "sacred" government property, President Trump's highly prized but shoddily renovated Reflecting Pool.

"This is not only a priority for the president, but for myself," said Ms. Pirro, the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, disclosing felony vandalism charges against Mr. Hearn for touching the lining of the pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial. She added: "We will prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Hearn willfully destroyed property."

This was not the case.

Ms. Pirro's office dramatically reversed course on Friday, not only withdrawing the charge against Mr. Hearn but blasting the Interior Department for the rushed and "botched" renovation, along with U.S. Park Police officials who fed bad information that led her to publicly cite "tremendous evidence" against Mr. Hearn. In the process, intentionally or not, she skated perilously close to contradicting Mr. Trump — and he noticed.

Ms. Pirro's 20-page filing did not refer to, much less rebuke, Mr. Trump for claiming the damage was caused by left-wing vandals rather than his administration's missteps. But it raised innate doubts about his assertion that criminals had slashed the pool's lining with a "knife or blade."

That Ms. Pirro, a former Westchester, N.Y., district attorney and Fox News personality was aiming much of her criticism not at Mr. Trump, but his interior secretary, Doug Burgum, who oversaw the issuance of a no-bid contract to renovate the pool, did not appear to matter much.

On Saturday morning, Mr. Trump dashed off a post on Truth Social that made clear he was unhappy with Ms. Pirro, a friend and ally since the 1980s.

"I disagree 100% with Jeanine Pirro," Mr. Trump wrote.

"I don't know what she was thinking? To me, it was a pure case of VANDALISM," he wrote, adding, "There may have been some contractor difficulty, but the major damage was caused by VANDALS!"

In his own social media post on Saturday, Mr. Burgum said that his department had "provided the U.S. Attorney's office expert and eyewitness testimony to the damage done by vandals and provided every piece of evidence they asked for in the requested time line detailing each area of damage at the pool."

Ms. Pirro's U-turn was a rare instance in which a Trump-appointed U.S. attorney publicly acknowledged that a prosecution once embraced was fatally compromised, in an administration in which admitting fault is seen as weakness and in which taking actions that contradict the boss is seen as self-destruction.

"Trump is mad at Pirro because she finally admitted what we made clear in our legal filings all along: Trump's botched renovation was responsible for the damage, not Davey Hearn," said Norman L. Eisen a member of Mr. Hearn's defense team and a co-founder of Democracy Defenders Fund, which has represented people targeted by the Trump administration.

"Her claim that she and her office were previously duped by Interior is nonsense," he added. "Starting immediately after the arraignment, our motions repeatedly proved that the administration was to blame, not Davey."

Tim Lauer, a spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office, declined to comment. "The filing speaks for itself," he wrote in an email.

The about-face also underscored a pattern that has diminished the Justice Department's once-sterling standing with federal judges and juries — the rush by Trump-appointed U.S. attorneys across the country to take quick action against those accused by the president of transgressions, even petty ones.

It is now much more common for grand juries around the country, particularly in Washington, to reject indictments brought by the department. In years past, this almost never happened.

Ms. Pirro's filing is, in a sense, an effort to replace the case against Mr. Hearn in federal court with a case in the court of public opinion against Mr. Burgum; the contractor, Atlantic Industrial Coatings; and Park Police officials.

In the filing, she said that her staff relied almost exclusively on claims by Interior Department officials that the extensive damage to the lining of the pool was caused by Mr. Hearn and other vandals who were observed tugging at or removing material from the wall.

That information, coupled with police testimony about Mr. Hearn's movements, convinced prosecutors to bring the case before the grand jury on July 2. They opted for a felony, which carried a potential 10-year prison sentence, rather than a misdemeanor, because the damage exceeded the legal threshold of $1,000.

At the time, Ms. Pirro wrote, her office "was not in possession of any information from D.O.I. indicating that any damage to the Reflecting Pool was caused by anything other than the actions of the defendant and other vandals who damaged the pool's lining."

It all began to unravel, however, after prosecutors followed up by asking for "everything" — government reports, police and witness statements, photographs, body camera footage and, critically, internal assessments of the high-profile renovation project.

By late July, Ms. Pirro's office obtained 695 megabytes of documents that led Ms. Pirro to conclude the damage observed was "the result of flawed installation by the contractor," coupled with "the rush to complete the project prior to events associated with the America250 celebration."

"Trump's botched renovation was responsible for the damage."

But Ms. Pirro's critics, including Mr. Eisen, said her account ignored the fact that problems with the renovation of the algae-choked pool had been widely known and reported in the press and in their own court filings.

Mr. Hearn's team maintained that he had merely "touched a piece of coating that had already detached, released it when asked to do so by a park employee, and left the pool in no worse condition in which he found it."

Photos and testimony introduced in the case had indicated that substantial cracks had already appeared, and water had started leaking from the pool, before Mr. Hearn's visit. Mr. Hearn's lawyers questioned whether that information had been made clear to grand jurors, complaining of "irregularities that reflect a misleading presentation."

His legal team was "evaluating all legal remedies," Mr. Eisen said.

Zach Montague contributed reporting.

Lame-duck senator wields power

CONGRESSIONAL MEMO
WASHINGTON

With little left to lose, John Cornyn pushes back against a Trump demand

BY MICHAEL GOLD

Not long after Senator John Cornyn lost his re-election bid to a right-wing challenger backed by President Trump, the Texas Republican predicted that the remainder of his Senate tenure might be a "pretty bumpy ride" for the president. He warned that he and other lame-duck senators had "some cards to play" and would not hesitate to use them.

Last week, depending on the metaphor you prefer, Mr. Cornyn either made himself a giant senatorial pothole or laid his hand on the table.

By wielding his vote on the Judiciary Committee as leverage, a newly liberated Mr. Cornyn threw Mr. Trump's choice for attorney general, Todd Blanche, into limbo as the Senate left town for the weekend on Thursday night.

Both he and Senator Thom Tillis — the North Carolina Republican who chose not to seek re-election after Mr. Trump threatened to unseat him — said that they would not advance Mr. Blanche's nomination unless the Justice Department agreed to narrow an immunity deal that Mr. Trump reached with the Internal Revenue Service to protect himself and his family.

The red line that Mr. Cornyn has drawn is fairly thin. He and Mr. Tillis are not seeking to kill the deal that Mr. Blanche negotiated with Mr. Trump's personal lawyers, which gave the president, his family and his businesses broad immunity, potentially saving them at least $100 million in penalties and drawing accusations from Democrats of self-dealing. They are merely demanding modifications — in writing.

Still, his willingness to dig in his heels against a demand by Mr. Trump at a moment when the president's popularity is sagging and senators are increasingly frustrated with him is notable.

Though Mr. Tillis has been more openly critical of Mr. Trump for months, Mr. Cornyn, a onetime contender for Senate majority leader, had long been a reliable Republican vote who rarely said a critical word about the president.

The senator, whose political future was cut short by Mr. Trump, has seemed to delight in the shift in power. Asked if the impending end of his political career had imbued him with a sense of independence, the senator flashed reporters crowded around him a playful smile.

"Have you noticed?" he said.

Yet as he finds himself emboldened, Mr. Cornyn has fashioned himself not as a scorned outcast seeking retribution but rather as a shield for other Republicans who share his concerns about the president's settlement but fear the political consequences of airing them. In doing so, he has confirmed a truism of the Trump era: Republicans in Congress routinely swallow their distaste for and even outrage about the president's actions, usually daring to act on them only once they are on their way out the door.

ALEX KENT/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Senator John Cornyn has thrown President Trump's choice for attorney general, Todd Blanche, into limbo.

Mr. Cornyn made it explicit on Thursday morning, right after Mr. Trump suggested he might postpone Mr. Blanche's nomination until the next Congress to get around the two Republican objectors.

The president "is mistaken if he believes concerns about the provisions in his tax lawsuit settlement are limited to me and Senator Tillis," Mr. Cornyn wrote on social media.

Some of his Republican colleagues backed him up — but none of those who are currently seeking re-election. Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska said that she "was actually hopeful" about Mr. Cornyn's negotiations with Mr. Blanche because she had raised the same issues with him in a private meeting.

"I made it very clear where my concerns were," Ms. Murkowski said. She said she had asked the nominee both about narrowing the I.R.S. settlement agreement and ensuring that a plan by the Justice Department to establish a $1.8 billion fund for people claiming to have been unfairly prosecuted by the government was "truly dead," another concern Mr. Cornyn had raised.

Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, who also lost his Republican primary to a Trump-backed challenger, said that he shared Mr. Cornyn's desire to see limits on the I.R.S. settlement.

Senator John Curtis, Republican of Utah, told The Deseret News, a Utah-based newspaper, that he supported Mr. Cornyn's efforts.

Mr. Cornyn's request is fairly modest. He wants the Justice Department to guarantee what Mr. Blanche said under oath at his confirmation hearing: that the I.R.S. immunity would apply only to Mr. Trump, two of his sons and the Trump Organization, and that it would be limited only to audits of past tax returns.

"All we're doing is asking them to put that in writing," Mr. Cornyn said.

That is a break from a now established pattern in which congressional Republicans critical of Mr. Trump's policies offer broad and unspecific objections, only to back down after receiving equally broad assurances.

It was a strategy he had already deployed successfully. Earlier last month, Mr. Cornyn threatened to block two of Mr. Trump's ambassadorial nominees if the administration continued withholding millions of dollars that Congress appropriated for H.I.V. prevention.

Mr. Cornyn's parameters seemed to help him keep his colleagues' support rather than drawing their scorn for sinking one of the president's priorities.

"I certainly respect my colleague's right to ask questions and to get items that were within his testimony clarified," said Senator Mike Rounds, Republican of South Dakota.

And, he added, if Mr. Blanche "can't get them clarified, then that suggests that maybe there's a misunderstanding as to what he was testifying for in the first place."

Carl Hulse and Olivia Diaz contributed reporting.

Ailing, absent, but still in office

WASHINGTON

Calls for Mitch McConnell to resign from Senate are going unheeded

BY CARL HULSE

Mitch McConnell is just the latest member of the U.S. Senate to be absent for an extended period of time because of poor health.

But a charged political environment and a social media storm have intensified demands for more transparency regarding the 84-year-old's condition, and for Mr. McConnell, whose term ends in January, to step aside if he cannot participate in the Senate for the remainder of his tenure.

"As Governor of the state you serve, I am calling on you to directly and verbally address the people of Kentucky and provide proof of your capacity to serve, or resign," Gov. Andy Beshear of Kentucky, a Democrat, wrote to Mr. McConnell last Monday as the senator passed his sixth week in a hospital after a fall at his home on Capitol Hill.

Few who know him believe Mr. McConnell is going anywhere. Here's why.

MANY PRECEDENTS

Over the decades, many senators have missed months and even years of Senate business, with some recent prominent figures such as John McCain, Republican of Arizona, and Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, going months without voting before they both died in office, of brain cancer.

Mr. McConnell, the Senate Republican leader for nearly 18 years, had a prolonged absence himself after a serious fall in 2023 that sidelined him for five weeks. He ultimately announced that he would not try to return as leader in 2026, followed by his decision that he would not seek re-election to an eighth term this year. His Senate tenure is set to end on Jan. 3, 2027.

Stories of senators refusing to leave despite debilitating medical conditions are legion. Senator Karl Mundt of South Dakota was absent from the Senate for the final three years of his term after suffering a stroke in 1969, and refused calls that he resign.

Many other senators have been allowed substantial time to recover. They include Mark Kirk, Republican of Illinois, who was away for almost a year after suffering a stroke in 2012. In another case, Democrat Tim Johnson of South Dakota was out for nine months after experiencing bleeding in the brain in December 2006. Both men were warmly welcomed back by their colleagues.

DESIRE TO LEAVE ON HIS OWN TERMS

Members of the Senate are often advanced in years, since the office is usually the capstone of a political career; more than a third of current senators are 70 or older. The institution also runs on seniority, providing an incentive for members to remain as long as they can as they amass power and privilege.

At the same time, senators have historically been reluctant to share details of their health issues for fear of weakening themselves politically. And it has only been fairly recently, as voters have grown more critical of how aging lawmakers dominate Congress, that senators have faced public scrutiny about their fitness to serve.

John Feehery, a longtime congressional aide and Republican strategist, said forcing a special election to replace Mr. McConnell for a matter of months would be a waste of time and money.

Under Kentucky law, if there is a Senate vacancy more than three months before Election Day, a special election must be held to fill the seat. Democrats have stepped up their pressure on Mr. McConnell ahead of the deadline, Aug. 3.

"Mitch McConnell deserves the right to serve out the term however he sees fit," Mr. Feehery said. "He is certainly not the first senator to have health problems which require him to miss votes and he certainly won't be the last."

KNOWN FOR BEING TIGHT-LIPPED

Mr. McConnell is notoriously close-mouthed when he deems it to be to his advantage. His absence and failure to provide detailed updates on his health outside of the written statements and photographs provided by his office have generated an outpouring of speculation about the severity of his condition on social media.

Senate colleagues, though, say they have spoken with him and received personal text messages.

In the most recent update from his office last week, the office of the Capitol physician said that doctors meet with Mr. McConnell daily but have not cleared him for a return to work or to his home.

His colleagues hope he can return to the Senate at some point, as they expect to commemorate his long and consequential service before he leaves office.

Others note that it will take more than Governor Beshear's push to force Mr. McConnell out before he is ready.

"One of Senator McConnell's singular traits is tenacity," said Ross K. Baker, distinguished professor emeritus of political science at Rutgers University in New Jersey, and a longtime student of the Senate.

KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Mitch McConnell heading to a Senate vote in May. The senator has spent more than six weeks in a hospital after a fall. His absence has generated speculation about his condition.

Business

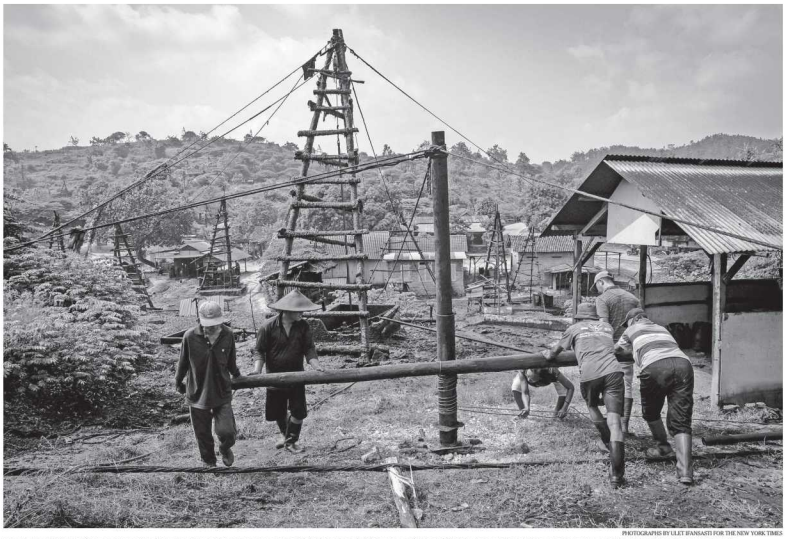
From left: collecting residual crude oil from a river near the Wonocolo oil field in East Java, Indonesia; operating an old truck engine that was modified to pull a handmade oil pump; and filling containers. Most of the crude is sold to the state oil company, Pertamina.

Drilling for oil the old-fashioned way in Java

INDONESIA DISPATCH
TEKSAS WONOCOLO, INDONESIA

Community-run wells use sticks, buckets and old engines to extract crude

BY HASYA NINDITA



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ULET IFANSASTI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Workers trying to free a pump stuck in the ground in the Wonocolo oil field. The shallowness of the oil field means that villagers can extract oil without heavy equipment.

The old red truck's engine was jury-rigged to control a pump tied to a three-legged tower cobbled together from teak logs and rope. Sujiyanto sat in the cab of the vehicle, cigarette in hand. He released the gas pedal, sending the pump hundreds of feet underground before hauling it back up filled with crude oil.

"This is how we extract oil from the ground," said Mr. Sujiyanto, 51, who, like many Indonesians, goes by one name.

Around him on a recent Wednesday, smoke rose over the hills, which were dotted with teak derricks. The smell of oil lingered in the air and the ground was slicked black. Nearby, a group of men used their bare hands to crank out a pump stuck into the ground.

This is the Wonocolo oil field in East Java, Indonesia, where subsistence oil drilling has endured for decades. It was discovered by troops digging for water in 1893, when Indonesia was a Dutch colony. Reaching depths of about 1,600 feet (500 meters), it is considered one of the world's shallowest oil fields, allowing the community to extract oil without heavy machinery.

Big oil companies have long considered the field, which covers about 120 acres (50 hectares), commercially insignificant. Nonetheless, community drilling here has survived through the booms and busts of the oil market. Many here have welcomed the energy shock from the Iran war, even as the Indonesian government has looked to Russia to shore up oil supplies.

"We are actually happy when oil prices rise, because our income increases," said Mr. Sujiyanto, who has been working here for around 15 years.

Next to his truck, three other men worked at separate stations. One sat inside a hut beside the pump, maneuvering it with a long wooden stick. Two others, equipped with buckets, scooped oil that had pooled around the well at the base of the derrick. For an hour, they worked in sync to collect the oil that totaled up to 200 liters, or a bit over a barrel. Then, they moved onto another well.

These are not the only community-run oil wells in Indonesia. There are about 34,000 of these, not counting the few hundred in Wonocolo, according to government data. But Wonocolo stands out for its history and some savvy marketing. It is also known as Little Texas because the local government christened it Teksas Wonocolo, which is a nod to the U.S. state and stands for Tekad Selalu Aman dan Sejahtera, or "Always Safe and Prosperous."

But like most community-run wells, those at Wonocolo are not registered with the government, said Afftaudin, the acting head of the East Java Energy and Mineral Resources Department. As a result, they are not subject to safety regulations and operate in a gray area.

Five years ago, a miner was caught in a pulley rope while inspecting a well and died instantly, said Heri, a distiller who has worked in the field for 15 years.

"This is a scary job," said Mr. Heri.

Many in the area work as distillers, boiling the crude in a furnace to separate out water and to sell the resulting unrefined diesel. Environmentalists worry about air and soil pollution, as well as the long-term effects on the health of the drillers.

Pradipta Indra Ariono, the director of WALHI East Java, an environmental nonprofit group, said the oil industry at Wonocolo was a sign of the lack of jobs in the region.

"They dig for oil because there is no better option," Mr. Pradipta said.

For decades, Suwoto, 73, has scraped residual oil from the river, gutter or puddles near the field. He collects crude remnants and boils them to separate oil and water. The oil is then skimmed off with a spatula and transferred into barrels. In a day, he can gather up to two jerrycans, or about 40 liters, which he sells for around $25.

At night, Mr. Suwoto works as a security guard in the field. He said, "I guard the mine from oil and machinery thieves."

For Mujiyono, 70, the wells have been a source of income for three generations of his family. He grew up in the area, brought here by his parents as a child. Before old truck engines were introduced, he recalled, miners operated most pumps manually, with at least 10 people working together.

"Around the 1990s, one well could produce up to 38 barrels of oil per day and run 24 hours," he said.

About 800 wells are scattered across two villages, Wonocolo and Hargomulyo, with at least 200 still producing oil. Most of the crude drilled here is sold to the state oil company, Pertamina.

But the oil reserves have been depleted over the years, Mr. Mujiyono said. Today, it can take a week to extract seven to eight barrels of crude from a single well, which sells for about 7.2 million Indonesian rupiah, or about $400, which is below the market rate. Most men here typically work across five or six wells and, in a good month, can earn up to $400.

The wells provide jobs but are not registered with the government and therefore not subject to safety regulations.

Over a decade ago, Sumanta, 64, began investing in abandoned wells. Now, he said, he can dig up oil to fill as many as 300 barrels a week, which he sells to Pertamina. He remains optimistic about Wonocolo's prospects.

"We need to dig deeper," he said.

Worried about the wells running dry, the government began an effort about a decade ago called Petroleum Geoheritage Wonocolo to promote tourism in the area. It built an observation tower, a museum and a hall for food vendors, but the initiative has largely languished.

"We had visitors before — most of them were university students or researchers," Mr. Suwoto said. The museum remains open, but it is also used as a rest stop by researchers and other travelers. The observation tower, when I visited, offered an arresting overview of the Wonocolo field paired with blue skies and black smoke coming from the wells. The food hall lay abandoned and the area was covered with weeds.

'Friendly' environment spurs a race to close daring deals

Trump administration seen as more flexible in granting approvals

BY LAUREN HIRSCH

TOM LITTLE/REUTERS

DANIELLE VILLASANA/REUTERS

Amid a sharp rise in deals involving large companies, Novo Nordisk's chief executive, Maziar Mike Doustdar, left, said the drug maker was looking for acquisitions, while NextEra Energy, led by John Ketchum, right, announced a merger with Dominion Energy in May.

Giant utility deals do not come along often. Mergers in this heavily regulated industry require approvals from multiple agencies and often face pushback from politicians and local civic groups worried about rising electricity prices.

But two of the largest power companies in the United States, NextEra Energy and Dominion Energy, are giving it a try, with a $67 billion deal announced in May. Sysco, the big food distributor, also went big in March with the $29 billion acquisition of Jetro Restaurant Depot, a supplier to independent restaurants, a deal that could reshape the food supply industry.

And last month, Stripe and the private equity firm Advent International offered about $53 billion to acquire PayPal, in what would be one of the largest-ever deals in financial services.

Companies across America are seizing on what may be the most favorable regulatory environment for businesses in years to complete deals that might have been unlikely under previous presidencies. The rush is on to get them done before President Trump's term runs out.

"There is a 'now or never' attitude for attempting transformational combinations," lawyers at Hunton Andrews Kurth wrote in a note this year.

Although Mr. Trump plays no formal role in approving most mergers, he has publicly weighed in on deals. Some executives, recognizing that the administration is more transactional than its predecessors, have stopped by the White House during their efforts to get his administration's blessing for them.

The regulators the president has appointed to oversee deals have taken a more flexible approach. For example, the Justice Department said last month that it would fast-track its review of some mergers, asking fewer questions upfront. Associate Attorney General Stanley Woodward said in a statement that the approach "preserves the integrity and rigor" of its reviews while "facilitating expedited review in appropriate cases."

The new policy was a sign the department was "open for business," lawyers at Wilmer Hale wrote in a memo for clients.

"You have a federal antitrust enforcement regime that is viewed generally as meaningfully more accommodative than the Biden administration," said Edward Lee, a partner at the law firm Kirkland & Ellis. "Obviously, or in terms of dealmakers and dealmaking animal spirits, that's always a good thing."

Analysts at Goldman Sachs said they expected busy deal activity to continue into the second half of the year, citing, among other factors, a "friendly" regulatory backdrop. The firm's list of potential targets for acquisitions include the copper company Freeport-McMoRan, as the building of A.I. data centers increases demand for the metal. Analysts expect the boom in data centers to spur other deals as well, particularly in power and energy.

Banking executives have picked up talks about merging their own businesses, as regulators have unwound the Biden administration's efforts to make those deals harder. There has long been a debate about how stringently to monitor banking deals, because some critics argue they could force the closure of vital community branches or consolidate risk among fewer banks. Some, though, including former Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen, have argued that more consolidation among the roughly 4,100 small U.S. banks could help steady industry volatility.

In November, the comptroller of the currency, Jonathan Gould, described acquisitions in the industry as potentially "quite valuable." Analysts at Jefferies, who wrote that approval times for banking deals "appear to be fast-tracked," recently listed M&T Bank and Wells Fargo among the likely future acquirers. (Wells Fargo was freed last year from an asset cap, imposed by the Federal Reserve, that prevented the bank from growing.)

JPMorgan Chase's chief executive, Jamie Dimon, has said the bank is considering acquisitions for as large as $20 billion.

Pharmaceutical companies continue to explore acquisitions to keep their drug pipeline stocked. "I think that we are looking more than ever before," Novo Nordisk's chief executive, Maziar Mike Doustdar, told CNBC in May.

Some lawyers and bankers say the flood of global deals this year — worth about $3.2 trillion through June, a 45 percent jump from a year earlier — is simply pent-up demand after the Biden administration.

Still, "caution is warranted," the Hunton Andrews Kurth lawyers wrote in their note, given a number of unpredictable speed bumps, including political influence over deal reviews.

A year ago, Union Pacific announced its $85 billion deal for Norfolk Southern, which would create the United States' first coast-to-coast rail network, linking 43 states. The deal also would put around two-fifths of rail freight in the hands of one company, raising fears of higher prices in a crucial industry.

Railroad deals require approval by the federal Surface Transportation Board, and in May it surprised some in the industry by pausing its review of this one. Around the same time, Mr. Trump publicly floated taking a 15 percent stake in what he called the "very big" merger. The federal government had already taken a "golden share" in Nippon Steel's deal for U.S. Steel as part of its approval.

"There's an opportunity of transformational M&A, but there is also a risk of tripping," said Ethan Klingsberg, who leads the mergers and acquisitions practice at the law firm Freshfields. "Navigating the White House as well as navigating antitrust authorities at the Justice Department and Federal Trade Commission is a delicate task. It's easy to make a mistake."

Some trial balloons have already popped. Mr. Trump said he was opposed to a merger of United Airlines and American Airlines after the idea was broached in Washington. (An unusual American Airlines news release welcomed the "leadership and strong support of President Trump" and said a deal would be bad for competition.)

And executives are wary that an overt entreaty to the White House can attract too much attention from Democratic state attorneys general, because they view the approval process as blatantly political or are simply concerned by the acquisition — or both.

That scrutiny could intensify if Democrats in Congress get subpoena authority in the midterm elections, lawyers and bankers say. "The questions of political interference on the antitrust side are very, very hot right now," said David Schwartz, an antitrust partner at Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner.

The attorneys general must be selective about their targets because they have fewer resources than federal enforcers. But they have demonstrated in recent months that they can create real headaches for some of the highest-profile deals.

In April, state attorneys general secured a restraining order to halt the merger of the broadcasting companies Nexstar and Tegna, months after Mr. Trump urged on social media, "GET THAT DEAL DONE!"

And a dozen Democratic attorneys general sued to halt Paramount's acquisition of Warner Bros Discovery. Paramount then agreed to halt its deal, potentially through June, as it prepares to defend the acquisition in court.

BUSINESS

POPPY LYNCH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Alex Ottoboni with a solar panel at his condo in San Francisco. Plug-in systems are much cheaper than rooftop build-outs, some costing just a few hundred dollars a panel.

An easier, cheaper path to solar

LOS ANGELES

Plug-in systems are legal in 10 U.S. states but still await safety certifications

BY IVAN PENN AND CLAIRE BROWN

After watching a YouTube video about solar panels that can be plugged into a regular electrical outlet, Melani Jackson plopped four panels in the backyard of her Salt Lake City home.

In the six months since, she has lowered her electricity bill by about $77 in total. While that's not a large sum, she is happy to have banked those savings, which required little effort on her part.

"I just really appreciated the idea of being able to do something to cut even just a few dollars off my energy bill plus just become a little bit more environmentally friendly," Ms. Jackson, 35, said.

Millions of Americans worried about rising energy costs might soon follow in her footsteps as states start allowing homeowners and renters to plug in solar panels on balconies, in backyards and other places. Plug-in systems are much smaller and cheaper than rooftop build-outs — some costing just a few hundred dollars a panel. Permits are not required in the states that allow their use, and people can often install them on their own.

Utah became the first state to legalize plug-in solar systems last year. Nine others, including New Jersey, Virginia and Colorado, have joined it, and lawmakers in California, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and several other states are considering doing so.

Colorado enacted one of the broadest plug-in solar laws this year. The sponsor of the bill, State Representative Lesley Smith, a Democrat, said she had first seen the technology during a trip to Germany, which has pioneered its use. When she discussed plug-in solar systems at a town hall, she said, "everyone started clapping."

Home solar panels have, of course, been around for many years. But conventional rooftop systems can cost as much as $36,000, and in many American cities and towns it can take months to obtain the required permits. Such systems have also lost financial appeal in recent years because states, at the urging of electric utility companies, have reduced the bill credits that homeowners can earn from the excess electricity their panels send to the grid.

Plug-in systems get around many of the hassles of conventional rooftop solar. But despite the enthusiasm for the technology, no plug-in solar system has yet been certified as safe to use in the United States. States that have passed laws allowing the systems to be sold require them to be certified by organizations like UL Solutions, a company that tests, validates and sets standards for various products.

The result is a gap growing between enthusiasm for plug-in solar and the availability of a product that has been proven safe.

UL Solutions soon expects to certify at least one of the plug-in solar systems for use in the United States, said Kenneth Boyce, the company's vice president of engineering. He warned that people should avoid uncertified products, because they could cause electrical shocks or damage electrical equipment and start fires.

For now, some Americans are exploiting a murky certification landscape and shopping online for plug-in systems for their homes, condominiums and apartments.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, Alex Ottoboni, who lives in a condominium, bought two panels even though he knew that California had not yet passed a plug-in solar law.

Hanging from his balcony, the panels generate enough electricity to save him $5 to $7 a month on a bill that typically runs about $400 but has reached as high as $680 in winter.

"I don't like having to be reliant on my utility," said Mr. Ottoboni, 32, who works in software. He added that his electricity service was not reliable and "just getting more expensive every year."

The average residential electricity rate in the United States in April was up 7 percent from a year earlier, according to the Energy Information Administration. But rates have been steadily rising for several years, and most industry experts expect costs to continue increasing. Utility companies are spending to upgrade their systems to keep up with electricity demand from data centers and to make up for maintenance that was deferred over the past several decades.

Millions of Americans worried about rising energy costs may adopt plug-in solar panels.

A handful of companies have begun catering to people like Mr. Ottoboni and Ms. Jackson.

Bright Saver, a California nonprofit group, recently began selling plug-in solar kits at cost, meaning the organization makes no profit on the sales. Its goal is to expand access to solar systems and push other companies to drive down their prices. Its two-panel, 360-watt system is roughly big enough to power a refrigerator and sells for $414.17.

Those systems are too small to pose any safety risks, said Cora Stryker, a cofounder of the organization. Even so, the laws in Maine, New York and Vermont require certification of those systems because of the more stringent policies in those states.

"We know people want these — they want them now," Ms. Stryker said. "Electricity prices are skyrocketing, and people are really worried about climate change."

EcoFlow and Craftstrom sell larger systems for $1,300 to $2,600. EcoFlow ships to addresses in Utah and Maryland, which have passed laws allowing plug-in solar, and Craftstrom sells to all 50 states, capitalizing on certification standards. Both companies have said they plan to seek full certification from UL Solutions.

Stephan Scherer, founder and chief executive of Craftstrom, said sales had increased 50 percent in the past year as state lawmakers passed legislation for plug-in solar systems. The company is on track to sell thousands of units a year, he said.

Utility executives in the United States have expressed concerns that electricity produced by the systems might feed back into the power grid, posing a danger to linemen working on power lines that they believed were not carrying electricity.

Pedro J. Pizarro, president and chief executive of Edison International, the parent company of the utility Southern California Edison, said that he supported the idea of the plug-in solar technology but that his company opposed legislation introduced in the California Legislature to legalize such systems. He said the bill did not go far enough in protecting utility workers.

Backers of plug-in solar technology say that the safety issues will soon be resolved and that more states ought to legalize it to help people with rising energy costs.

"Politicians all over the country are wringing their hands, wanting to do something about energy affordability," said Bernadette Del Chiaro, a senior vice president at the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit organization focused on health and safety. "Here is an immediate answer."

Ivan Penn reported from Los Angeles, and Claire Brown from New York.

How to safely use plug-in panels

There are important issues to consider when picking and installing yourself

BY IVAN PENN AND CLAIRE BROWN

So you want to cut your electric bill and are eyeing the solar panels that can plug into any outlet in a home to produce your own power?

You may want to wait for a little while.

None of the systems available in the United States have yet received a crucial certification that deems them safe to use in single-family homes, condominiums and apartments. Experts who set safety standards expect to certify some panels soon.

"We really do love the idea of empowering consumers," said Kenneth Boyce, vice president of engineering at UL Solutions, a company that tests, validates and sets standards for various products. "We're really focused on keeping people safe."

Plug-in or so-called balcony-solar systems have become popular in Germany in recent years. Ten American states have passed legislation making them legal, and many others are considering measures that would allow consumers to buy and install them.

Cost and simplicity have driven much of the excitement over the plug-in solar systems. Typically, homeowners do not need to hire installers to connect these solar panels, as they would for conventional rooftop systems that, in the United States, can cost as much as $36,000.

Plug-in systems can be as cheap as a few hundred dollars and typically top out at roughly $2,000.

What certification do these panels need and why?

You want to look for products that carry the "UL 3700" certification. It indicates that the product has been tested and meets the safety criteria set by UL Solutions.

Some systems produce so little electricity — under 400 watts — that they do not pose a safety risk, their makers claim.

But the prongs on larger systems could deliver a momentary shock risk after they are disconnected from the outlet. The UL 3700 standard requires the prongs to be "touch safe," prompting some developers to encase them in plastic, similar to those found on electric vehicle chargers. Others have created equipment like protective sleeves.

Another potential problem has to do with home circuit breakers. Typically, a household circuit operates on a breaker based on how much electrical current an appliance requires.

When circuits are overloaded, breakers can trip to prevent fires and damage to the electrical equipment.

A plug-in solar system that lacks UL 3700 certification could mask how much electrical current is flowing on a particular circuit because the panels are supplying electricity. In that case, a breaker might not detect that the circuit is being overloaded by other appliances on the same circuit.

"The holy grail is to wait and make sure it is listed to UL 3700 certification," said Bernadette Del Chiaro, a senior vice president at the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit organization focused on health and safety. "It puts all the onus on the manufacturers to put in safety devices."

Some products may claim to be UL certified or UL compliant because certain components of the system, such as inverters, meet existing or draft standards. However, UL Solutions has said it expects its certification to apply to entire systems, not just individual parts. Other organizations also certify these products, but certifications from UL Solutions tend to be coveted by industry players.

Once certified panels are available, can I really install them myself?

Theoretically, yes. A major selling point for these systems is that they are no more difficult to set up than a television or a Wi-Fi router. They are designed to be lightweight and renter friendly.

But some state lawmakers have considered mandating that qualified electricians install the systems. And the final UL 3700 safety certification may require an electrician's help to install a special electrical outlet for plugging the panels into.

What is the best place to put these panels?

The panels are generally about the size of a window, and can be hung on balconies or placed in backyards — anywhere outdoors with six hours or more of full sun. South-facing areas are ideal because they tend to get the most sun.

If you rent your home, check your state's law to see if there are any requirements about notifying your landlord. Vermont, for example, requires tenants to give their landlords 10 days' notice before installing plug-in solar systems.

PATRICK JUNKER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Plug-in solar panels are as large as windows, and in Germany, above, they are often placed on balconies. Typically, homeowners do not need to hire professional installers.

Gas reserves in Europe are lagging, keeping prices high

Iran war has hit supplies, while extreme heat has increased energy demands

BY LISA FRIEDMAN

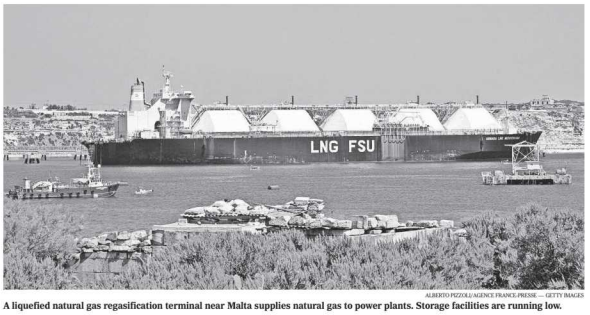
Months of war in the Middle East are complicating an already difficult annual rite in Europe: stocking up on energy for the cold months of winter.

Storage facilities for natural gas, which households and businesses use extensively for boilers and furnaces, are only 54 percent full. That's the second-lowest level for summer since 2011, and the lowest for July since 2021, when Russia's state-owned energy company was restricting gas supplies to Europe.

At the same time, continued airstrikes by the United States and Iran, and their effective blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, have slowed energy shipments out of the Persian Gulf. That has also complicated efforts in Europe to replenish storage.

"It's quite a worrying situation," said Chris Aylett, a research fellow in the Environment and Society Center at Chatham House, a think tank in London. "When you look at the situation in the Hormuz, you just don't have a sense of how this gets resolved," he added.

The likely consequence for Europe, experts say, will not be outright shortages of gas. Instead, they say, the restricted supplies will keep prices high.



ALBERTO PIZZOLI/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

A liquefied natural gas regasification terminal near Malta supplies natural gas to power plants. Storage facilities are running low.

Iran has essentially choked off the Strait of Hormuz, a vital waterway for oil and gas shipments, since the United States and Israel launched strikes on Feb. 28. Conditions for tankers in the region remain perilous, and Iranian damage to the energy infrastructure of Qatar, a major producer, has left lasting scars on the world's supply of natural gas.

The wholesale price for European natural gas soared in June to 60 euros per megawatt-hour, the highest it has been since the war with Iran began, and has continued to hover around that level. Without a lasting resolution to the war, analysts said, Europe will be forced to keep paying higher prices.

Before the war, about one-fifth of the world's liquefied natural gas flowed through the strait, primarily from Qatar. Little of that gas is now getting into markets.

"This will be felt by all L.N.G. importers, including Europe as it looks to refill its gas storage for next winter," Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, warned in the organization's monthly oil report on July 21.

Securing gas reserves has become a critical challenge for Europe in recent years. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the European Union and its allies actively replaced Russian pipeline gas with liquefied natural gas, primarily imported from the United States. To maintain energy stability, the European Union enforces seasonal regulations that require member states to meet storage benchmarks throughout the year.

By November, a few months before the war in Iran, average gas storage across E.U. member states was 75 to 80 percent — falling short of the 90 percent government target at the time.

As Europe grapples with supply disruptions from the war in Iran, it is also being hit by the costly impacts of climate change. This year, the challenge has been particularly acute as dangerous heat waves across the continent, fueled by rising global temperatures, have increased electricity demand for air-conditioning.

In France, the heat even forced some nuclear reactors to curb production, which meant an increased reliance on gas-fired power plants.

Europe is also competing for gas with Asia, where above-normal temperatures also are driving up demand.

The majority of Europe's gas is consumed in the wintertime. So countries try to keep storage levels high during the summer months to avoid paying peak prices in the coldest months.

The European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union, eased storage rules this year, allowing countries to target at least 80 percent of capacity by early November under difficult market conditions.

Some experts and industry officials are worried that Europe will not be able to meet the lower threshold.

"We do not believe that Europe will get to 80 percent storage filling before the winter," Torgrim Reitan, the chief financial officer at Equinor, a Norwegian energy giant, said on a recent earnings call.

Still, the continent is not in danger of running out of gas, according to the Energy Union Task Force, a coalition of European countries and commission members who coordinate energy policy.

Christoph Halser, a senior analyst at Rystad Energy, a consulting group, noted that Europe was in a better position than other parts of the world, particularly gas-dependent parts of Asia. That's because significant new liquefied natural gas export capacity from the United States is coming online, buffering the loss from Qatar.

Another factor weighing on the urgency to fill reserves is a looming reduction in about 12 percent of Europe's gas supply. In less than six months, European countries will by law have to end imports of Russian liquefied gas, increasing the need to bring in more cargoes from the United States and other countries.

Opinion

Whatever this is in Iran, it isn't working

The problem we face right now is something well beyond deals.

David French

VAHID SALEMI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The only thing worse than President Trump starting an unconstitutional war is President Trump losing control of that war.

On Wednesday, NBC News reported that Trump "erupted" at members of his national security team over the Iran War. According to the report, his advisers can't agree on a path forward. But how could they? Every path to victory risks dangerous escalation, while continuing the present course risks strategic defeat.

This was always the most likely outcome. The president chose to take on a much more powerful country than, say, Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 2003, while using far less force than we employed to topple the Iraqi government.

What did he expect would happen?

Oh right, we know. He thought he could topple a vicious, deeply embedded authoritarian regime with a few targeted airstrikes and a fantasied popular uprising. As he has said many times, he expected a version of his Venezuela outcome, and when the Venezuela strategy failed, if strategy is the word, there was no real Plan B — other than to bomb Iran more and hope for capitulation.

In fact, we're planning to do that yet again. Or maybe we're not.

On Friday, Trump said he was ordering a new round of airstrikes. And what was his reasoning? "You know at some point," Trump said, "they're going to say, 'We just can't take it anymore.' "

On Saturday, he'd changed his mind. "We have just been asked by Iran, and other Middle Eastern Countries, to hold off any attack," Trump said in a Truth Social post.

"I have agreed," he added, "for the future benefit of the WORLD and, likewise, the survival of a successful and prosperous Iran, to cancel the attack, subject to being able to rapidly make a DEAL."

But the problem we face right now is something well beyond deals. America has been so powerful for so long that we are accustomed to being in control of events. We start wars when we want and — crucially — we believe that we can end them when we want.

When I was in Iraq, as terrible as that war was, we knew it was contained. We were fighting an enemy that had minimal ability to harm Americans outside of Iraq. The same was true in Afghanistan once we and our allies destroyed Al Qaeda's strongholds.

In both conflicts, the fighting was brutal, and we can and should debate the wisdom of both wars. But our great-power rivals were largely absent.

There is no such thing as a safe war — any war can spin out of control — but the combination of American power, enemy weakness and Russian and Chinese restraint meant that Americans could sleep secure in the knowledge that the chances of a catastrophic escalation were extremely remote.

That is no longer the case. The world is walking a path toward a world war, and no one — including the president of the United States — seems to be in command of events.

Consider recent events. Not only does Iran continue to strike American bases effectively; it has relentlessly attacked American partners across the region. These attacks are doing immense damage to oil and gas facilities and — combined with Iran's continued control over the Strait of Hormuz — are placing the world economy at risk.

The Houthis have entered the conflict, expanding the fighting into the Red Sea, and now Saudi Arabia is reportedly planning a large-scale attack on Houthi territory, including, potentially, the use of ground forces to attempt to break the Houthi shipping blockade.

Ukraine struck an Iranian ship in the Caspian Sea, the immense body of water that borders both Russia and Iran. Ukraine said it did this because the ship was carrying military equipment between the two countries.

Russia and China may be assisting the Iranian military by providing satellite imagery and other assistance that renders Iranian missile and drone attacks more effective. Reuters has also reported that China is sending Iran hundreds of surface-to-air missiles.

NATO reported last week that a Russian missile crossed the border and exploded (harmlessly, thank God) in Polish territory. Several Russian drones have crossed the border since the start of the Ukraine war, but this is the first known Russian missile impact.

Speaking of Russia, it is reportedly considering whether to try to reverse the fortunes of its war in Ukraine through mass mobilization, which would mean conscripting potentially hundreds of thousands of new soldiers to throw against Ukrainian lines.

And of all this is taking place against the backdrop of two grim military realities for America. First, Iran has demonstrated that American planes and American bases are more vulnerable to attack than many of us imagined. This level of damage to American facilities would have been unthinkable when I was in Iraq.

Al Qaeda had no long-range missile capability, and not even Saddam Hussein, at the height of his powers before Operation Desert Storm, could strike across the region as effectively as Iran has since the start of the war.

Iran has taken grievous losses, including much of its top leadership. But the crucial difference with the United States is that the Iranian regime simply doesn't care about losses in men or matériel in the same way we do.

Both the United States and Israel have repeatedly decapitated the leadership of jihadist organizations, with little lasting effect. Iran has shown again and again that it will expend the lives of its citizens to retain power or to secure a strategic advantage. In fact, the regime seems to relish slaughtering the almost impossibly brave citizens who do rise up in protest.

Second, we're running out of interceptors, such as our Patriot antimissile systems, and other advanced munitions. While I don't want to see a single drone or missile penetrate our defenses and strike an American or allied target, I also know that even a successful intercept can be a mini-defeat.

If you're using a $4 million weapon that's difficult to manufacture to destroy a $35,000 drone that can be easily built at scale, it's only a matter of time before your defenses are degraded and

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The ways Hollywood keeps its secrets

Whispers can fester for years before anyone faces consequences. And the tactics celebrities use to escape scandal have completely changed.

Maureen Ryan

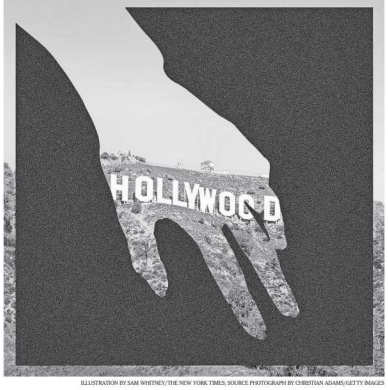

ILLUSTRATION BY SAM WHITNEY/THE NEW YORK TIMES; SOURCE PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTIAN ADAMS/GETTY IMAGES

The allegations of sexual misconduct against the Oscar winner Jared Leto that came out on July 29 in a BBC documentary were not a surprise to some in Hollywood. This was another case of, in certain circles, "everybody knows," as the industry saying goes. Yet that widespread knowledge has been insufficient to produce meaningful consequences.

Hollywood has always been a town of dark rumors about the terrible, often abusive behavior of some of its most prominent citizens, many of which turn out to be true. As a journalist covering the entertainment business, I've been made aware of these "open secrets" constantly. But that didn't mean I could necessarily write about them. There was an entire system in place to keep the victims quiet and keep any revelations out of the public eye.

That familiar dynamic played out when it comes to Mr. Leto. The BBC documentary, titled "Jared Leto: Hollywood's Dark Secret," delves into allegations of misconduct involving the actor and singer, building impressively on 2025 reporting by Elena Clavarino in AirMail — which Mr. Leto denied at the time — and compiling more than 120 online allegations relating to harassment and sexual misconduct. The documentary also depicts an array of enablers: people who would make sure teenage girls were brought backstage, invited to after parties and escorted to hotel rooms. The documentary paints a damning portrait of a man who used his Hollywood fame and rock-star persona to initiate troubling physical and verbal contact with women, most very young, all powerless compared to him.

Mr. Leto did not initially reply to the BBC's inquiries and, once the documentary was released, he issued this statement: "I have never sexually assaulted anyone in my entire life. These claims are absolutely and categorically false."

This response follows what's now become a familiar pattern. Once, a celebrity might have issued an aggrieved or lengthy rebuttal or a strenuous apology, but a new playbook has emerged. The blueprint is fairly consistent, often undertaken in conjunction with a pricey array of law firms and spin doctors in Hollywood: Ignore everything, or stonewall with "no comment." Maybe deny the allegations with a succinct sentence or two. Then either unleash hell on a publication and reporter in an attempt to quash the reporting, or say nothing further and wait for the scandal to pass.

Hollywood has an ignoble history of covering up stars' horrible behavior, but in the wake of #MeToo, a new well-oiled anti-accountability machine has flourished. The shrinking array of publications dedicated to covering Hollywood are not only often in rough financial shape but they're dependent on celebrity coverage — so they're vulnerable to being intimidated by threats of losing access to other celebrities, or they're likely to be tempted by enticing stories that will happen only if the outlet agrees to play ball.

The new crisis-management playbook involves simply riding out horrible rumors and fostering a counternarrative that discounts reports as untruthful and unreliable. Law firms persuade survivors to recant while PR operatives muddy the waters online by making efforts to "adjust the narrative in real time," as one firm's services were described in documents from the Blake Lively-Justin Baldoni case.

Thanks to years of reporting on these topics, as well as writing a book on power and complicity in Hollywood, I'm all too familiar with these scenarios. I also appear onscreen in "Hollywood's Dark Secret" to explain some of the power imbalances and abusive dynamics that fester in high-profile creative enterprises. When Alice McShane, the director of the BBC film, reached out to me, the queries she and the lead reporter Jessica Sartenaer had essentially boiled down to one big question: If "everybody knew" about the rumors about Leto, then why was nothing ever done?

There are many answers to that question, and here's one honest one: I don't know. No victimizer seems worthy of the industry's protection. No level of artistic achievement makes putting up with horrific behavior worthwhile. But there are other reasons for this kind of industrywide strategic apathy.

For over a century, almost all of the incentive structures in the commercial entertainment industries have allowed patterns of misbehavior and rewarded silence. Physical and mental abuse and boundary-crossing, especially in men, are tolerated as artistic passion and creative exploration. If you're opposed to someone's "passion" or their process — if you don't celebrate how they move through the world — then you just don't understand art. And when a lot of people make a percentage off the earnings of one famous individual, the capacity for denial is vast.

On a film or TV set or in a recording studio, there are usually a few people who have disproportionate power — a star artist, a top producer, a big-name director, a powerful executive. Hollywood has long had many ways to punish or blacklist those who are brave

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OPINION

The New York Times
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It wasn't the 'Civil War.' Try the 'Slaveholders' Rebellion.'

Anthony Conwright

In a written statement on the anniversary of Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox, President Trump described the Confederacy's defeat in 1865 as the end of "four brutal years of suffering." Rather than condemn the Confederacy's treason or name slavery as the cause for which it fought, Mr. Trump quoted Ulysses Grant's remarks to the vanquished army: "The war is over. The rebels are our countrymen again."

Rebranding rebellion is nothing new. Americans take it for granted that the war between the Confederate states and the Union was always called the Civil War, but it was not. During the war and in its aftermath, it was primarily called an "insurrection" or a "rebellion." Its current name is a result of decades of lobbying by Confederate heritage groups and white Southerners committed to rejuvenating the South's image and ignoring its treason and slaveholding.

As Mr. Trump and his allies try to whitewash the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection, we should return to an older and far more accurate name for the Civil War.

To face their own history, Americans must be honest about it.

We should once again call it the Slaveholders' Rebellion. If a country unquestioningly adopts language that obscures its bloodiest crimes to absolve their worst perpetrators, how can we expect successive generations to remember the new assaults on democracy without deploying equally forgiving language?

In the war's early years, the South's rebelliousness was emphasized in part as a legal necessity. Congress was underlining the president's constitutional authority to call forth the militia to suppress the Southern revolt. But in the decades after Lee's surrender, Confederate heritage groups lobbied Congress, educators and the broader public to adopt a name for the war that avoided calling the Southerners "rebels."

The use of "Slaveholders' Rebellion" began early. Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy's July 1861 bill to "suppress the slaveholders' rebellion" was one instance. But the language was subject to debate. One senator who later defected to the Confederacy said it created "odium and prejudice against a particular interest" — that is, slavery.

Conventions shifted only decades after the war, when white Southerners and their representatives in Congress collaborated to rewrite the history of the conflict. In 1899, one group pushed to expunge references to "rebellion" from historical and public discussion of the war. They preferred the misnomer "War Between the States," freeing the Confederacy of the stigma of revolt. From 1905 to 1911, the campaign's sympathizers in Congress moved to strike "War of the Rebellion" — the common name at the time — from legislation. "Civil War" became a compromise solution, mollifying Confederate nostalgics while being more acceptable to their opponents than War Between the States.

Other nomenclature followed. The Dewey Decimal System shifted its classification from "Rebellion, Southern" in 1876 to either the same term or "Civil War" two decades later. In 1895, the American Library Association directed its readers looking up "Rebellion" to instead search "U.S. History, Civil War." In 1907, Congress declared a preference for "Civil War," too. To this day, though, the U.S. Government Style Manual lists Civil War, War of the Rebellion and War Between the States as acceptable, a paper vestige of a hard-fought linguistic battle. One is an agreed-upon euphemism; one is accurate; the last is a lie.

American society's use of Civil War to rhetorically veil the slaveholders' rebellion has consequences. After the redemption of the Confederacy, ex-Confederates and their heirs helped create a regime of anti-Black violence by instituting a legal architecture of disenfranchisement and lynching. That is what makes confronting how we refer to the Civil War a civic imperative. The danger of rhetorical abstraction lies not only in its distortion of the past, but also in its pre-emptive justification for future assaults on democratic life.

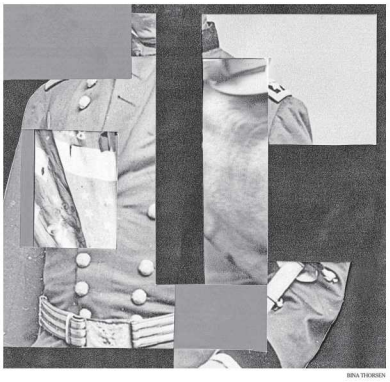
When Mr. Trump pardoned the Jan. 6 insurrectionists, he described them as victims of a "grave national injustice," framing their release as an act of "national reconciliation." It was a demonstration of the power clichéd tropes and evasion have to rewrite a country's moral code, rendering treachery as justifiable as patriotism. Jan. 6 became simply "the events."

Yet Mr. Trump's obfuscation of the insurrection could not erase the character of the rebels he sought to absolve, many of whom returned to criminal enterprises following their pardon. In February, Christopher Moynihan, who was among those who breached police barricades at the Capitol, pleaded guilty to charges associated with threatening to kill Representative Hakeem Jeffries. Enrique Tarrio was serving a 22-year sentence for seditious conspiracy for his role in the insurrection when he received Mr. Trump's pardon, only to be arrested a month later at the Capitol on charges of simple assault.

These pardons operate using the same logic of rehabilitation once used for the Confederacy, even if the consequences have not registered on the same scale. In both instances, moral laundering begins by changing the label applied to rebels. Mr. Trump's use of "national reconciliation" in his pardon helps revise the meaning of Jan. 6, reframing insurrectionists as martyrs and violent attempts to suppress American democracy as acts of patriotism.

The linguistic whitewashing of the Confederacy is more than a manufactured myth of Southern redemption. It is a ritual of national forgetting, one in which American society participates every time we call the Slaveholders' Rebellion against the United States the Civil War. "Civil War" is no name for a war waged by slaveholding traitors against the United States to hold Black Americans in human bondage. Now, 165 years since the war's first shots, we should be honest about how we hold its memory.

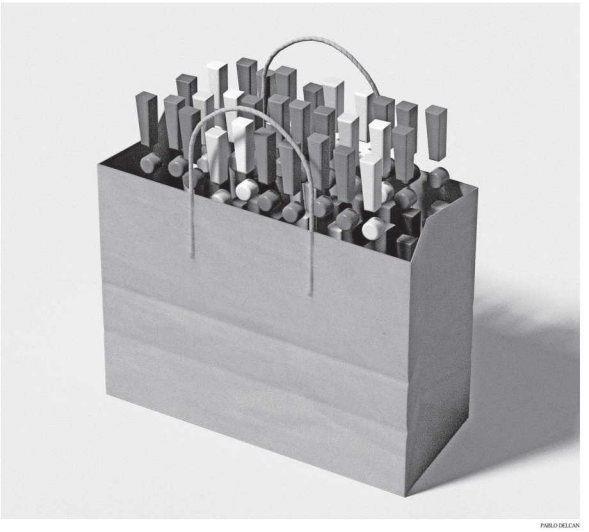
ANTHONY CONWRIGHT *is working on his first novel, "Speak, Blackness."*



BINA THORSEN

Our extravagant way of speaking

John McWhorter



PABLO DELCAN

As time passes by, it can seem as if people are ever more emphatic in how they communicate. What was once a single exclamation point now has to be (at least) two. Instead of just saying, "It was insane," someone will say, "It was actually insane," or, to the dismay of many, "It was literally insane."

Why can't we just tamp it down and relax? The reason is that human conversation is not only about making statements, but about making statements worth your interlocutor's attention. Our purpose is less to simply say, "This," than it is to say, "Here, think about this."

But as with anything designed to make a noise, so to speak, the effect wears off after time, like an old joke or a song you get tired of. This means that language is always drawing new things into the churn to keep us sounding urgent, committed. The linguist Martin Haspelmath calls this "extravagance," where we operate according to the maxim "Talk in such a way that you will be noticed."

The exclamation points are a classic example. Decades ago I was briefly under the impression that European academics were quite fond of me, as they would use an exclamation point after my name in emails. After a while I realized that, for them, that exclamation point was a sunny kind of politeness, a way of adding a dash of enthusiasm to a hello. Since then, something similar has happened to the exclamation point in America. A simple period now seems flat or even annoyed, while an exclamation point conveys a smiling salute, a signal that all is okay between you and the other person. ("Be there soon!") This means that to convey actual exclamation, we now need two markers. ("Good God!!") And I would not be surprised if in another 20 years people are using three.

We don't speak just to say something. We speak to be heard.

This extravagance is behind much of what can sound like jittery filler. "Yeah, no" is a great example. First person: "So moving that far out wasn't so bad after all, right?" Second person: "Yeah, no. We got a great house cheap and finally some peace and quiet." The "no" does not contradict the "yeah" but complements it. If that exchange had taken place a couple of generations ago, the second person would have just started with "yeah" in agreement. The added "no" agrees with the first "yeah" even more extravagantly by denying the idea many might have, that moving far out would be a bad thing. "Yeah, no" is a stronger version of "yeah."

We get extravagant even in our answers. "I know, right?" is what happened when "I know" alone lost its mojo. Fans of the old Britcom "Fawlty Towers" will recall the episode where Sybil is on the telephone and drives Basil crazy by repeating "I know!" as she listens to her friend. Today a Sybil in that situation may well repeat "I know, right?" The "right" gives "I know" some new spark. It sounds more connected, showing that you're really listening. This is also what is behind the uptick in people saying "100 percent!" as agreement.

In this vein, English is always and forever seeking new ways of saying "truly" in an emphatic, collar-clutching manner. In the 1300s "very" was the one to beat, but over time it lost its semantic punch. The grammarian Bryan Garner now judges that "in almost every context in which it appears, its omission would result in at most a negligible loss." "Really" was an attempt in the 1500s to create a new "truly" with the word "real." Time passed, and now the word is pronounced "rilly," and the connection to "real" comes out only in writing. Its force is also kaput. "Oh, that was really nice" serves almost as mere decoration. And here we have why someone today might say, "It was actually insane."

Or, yes, "literally insane," or "I was literally dying of thirst so we stopped at a 7-Eleven." Because in this usage of "literally," a scourge in the eyes of many, we do not actually mean that we were about to perish from clinical dehydration. But words often have contradictory meanings with no one batting an eye. A chair is stuck fast to the floor, but a rabbit runs fast. You seed the ground and seed a watermelon — no one thinks you insert seeds into your slice. The figurative use of "literally" is never confusing. It's just one more way of having a "truly" that pops. "Literally" is like that kid that everybody started picking on for no real reason in fifth grade — why him?

The churn is eternal. "Irregardless" is our attempt to give "regardless" a shot in the arm. "Bye-bye" adds some substance to what had become a lone "Bye," worn down over the centuries from "God be with you" to "Goodbye" to just "Bye."

If you know where to look, English is full of fossils of the extravagance of yesteryear. "Yes" started as "Yea." The "s" at the end is a worn-down remnant of what once meant "it is" — "Yes, it is!" was an "I know, right?" for the Dark Ages. And "yes" has been decorated endlessly since. First "yessir," and then the almost desperate-seeming "yessiree," and finally the goofy mystery of "Yessireebob!" Anything to keep "yes" popping.

Not long ago I heard someone praising my tween daughter's new hair color as "tuff." OK, that one is weird to me — but in the end, it's a more extravagant way of saying "cool." "Tuff" has a bit of street in it and is also creative in a diagonal sort of way — aesthetic appeal as "tough." "Cool," after all, is a tad elderly now to get the job done.

JOHN MCWHORTER *is an associate professor of linguistics at Columbia University.*

The world's largest democracy gets a second chance

KOMIREDDI, FROM PAGE 1

citizens was repatriated.

Instead, he has delivered a self-venerating, incompetent and malevolent Hindu-first regime, in which the superrich have become an entrenched oligarchy that controls vast resources and is effectively in command of the economy. Joblessness is rife, especially among the young. The government uses savagery against Muslims and other religious minorities to distract a self-pitying Hindu majority from the prime minister's failure to upgrade their standard of living, and institutions indispensable to the health of Indian democracy, such as Parliament, the judiciary and the press, sing from Mr. Modi's hymn sheet.

The glorification of the prime minister has become a pre-eminent priority of the state machinery. The largest stadium in India is named after him, rations to the poorest have been doled out in bags bearing his picture, officials compel students to celebrate his birthday, and mass gatherings are organized for citizens to listen to his radio broadcasts. A sense of resignation overtook the general public, which, disregarded by Mr. Modi's overweening regime and failed by an ineffective political opposition, had convinced itself that he could not be beaten in the polls.

Mr. Modi, now 75 years old, may eventually accept that he is too out of touch to lead the world's largest youth population and fade away. But, wounded and weak, he may also be more dangerous and unpredictable than before and may seek to restore his bruised authority. Reports are emerging that the police, in violation of assurances given by the government to demonstrators, detained or arrested students after the protests wound down last month.

Either way, the man who once claimed to be an "instrument for God," endowed with divine energy, has been spectacularly humbled.

"I grew up being taught to venerate him," a young student told me on July 24 at a protest site in Delhi where volunteers handed out food and water and fanned strangers with pieces of cardboard as crowds broke into chants like, "Whenever Modi's filled with fear, 'Hindu-Muslim' is what you'll hear!"

"But why should we be led by a man who has so far not produced his diploma?" he added, referring to a long-running controversy over university diplomas that Mr. Modi's party has released but whose authenticity is far from settled.

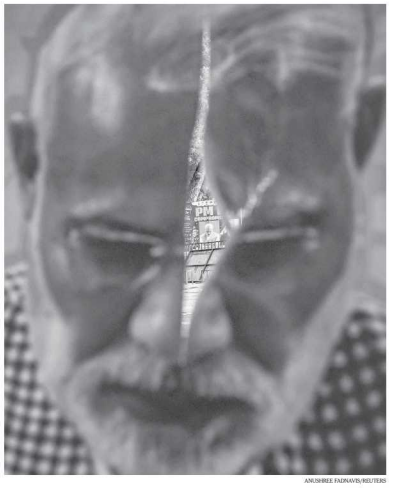
The irony of Mr. Modi's disputed academic credentials was not lost on the student protesters.

For millions of young Indians, acing the fiercely competitive entrance exams for professional degree programs is a pathway to a life of dignity. Families incur debts, pawn jewelry or mortgage their homes to pay for the tutoring needed to prepare their children.

But test questions for a range of examinations are regularly leaked and sold, upending the lives of students who had spent grueling months preparing. The breaking point came in May, when the national medical school entrance examination taken by more than two million students was canceled and rescheduled because of a breach. Some students took their own lives upon learning they would have to retake the exam.

The outrage intensified when India's chief justice, in an unrelated comment, likened unemployed young people to "cockroaches," giving the protesters their symbol. The Cockroach Janta Party — a riff on Mr. Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party — was born. What began as a joke became a vehicle for the rage of a generation. Millions rallied around the movement across the country, demanding the resignation of India's education minister and compensation for families of the students who died by suicide. A Gandhian hunger strike by a prominent activist and several students supercharged the movement.

At first, the government ignored the protesters; its myrmidons in the media painted them as tools of foreign forces seeking to destabilize India. But



ANUSHREE FADNAVIS/REUTERS

videos of police officers beating young Indians during the largely peaceful demonstrations in Delhi on July 20 exposed the lie. Mr. Modi slipped out of Parliament that day under heavy guard, his aura of indomitability trampled in the melee.

Digitally connected youth-led movements across South Asia have deposed increasingly autocratic regimes in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal in recent years. Mr. Modi, despite the worsening prospects for India's young, had largely dodged those currents. Now, his record is catching up with him.

The extraordinary events in India this summer have revealed how deeply the democratic habits promoted by the nation's founders have percolated. Young Indians have handed the world's largest democracy another chance at survival.

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ACPM **Printed in** Athens, Beijing, Beringen, Dubai, Frankfurt, Gallargues, Hong Kong, Islamabad, Karachi, Kathmandu, Kuala Lumpur, Lahore, London, Madrid, Milan, Nagoya, Osaka, Rome, Seoul, Taipei, Tel Aviv, Tokyo.
The New York Times Company 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018-1405, NYTCo.com; The New York Times International Edition (ISSN: 2474-7149) is published six days per week. A.G. SULZBERGER, Publisher ©2026 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Commission Paritaire No. 0528 C83099.
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Regional Offices: U.K. 1 Bartholomew Close, 3rd Floor, London, EC1A 7BL; **Hong Kong** 1201 K.Wah Centre, 191 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong; **France** 2, rue Favart, 75002 Paris, France. Printed in France by Midi Print ZAC du Pôle Actif. 18 Allée Piot 30660 Gallargues le Montueux.

Why do we tolerate Musk's racist commentary?

Jamelle Bouie

"The Turner Diaries" is a work of white supremacist agitprop. It purports to be the diary of a neo-Nazi militant, Earl Turner, who is working to overthrow the United States government — or as the book calls it, "the System" — through a group called "the Organization." Turner castigates "the System" for promoting integration, encouraging nonwhite immigration and placing Jewish people, Black Americans and other minorities in positions of authority over whites.

Among other atrocities, the novel describes nuclear attacks on predominantly Black cities, a Holocaust of Jewish Americans, the total ethnic cleansing of California, the subjugation of women and the "Day of the Rope" — a mass public lynching of white people deemed "race traitors" for their relationships with nonwhites. The book's epilogue describes a future after the "Great Revolution" in which the former United States is now an all-white, utopian garrison state led by the Organization, which went on to export its revolution and exterminate nonwhites worldwide.

The white power movement in the United States, notes the historian Augusta Dell'Omo in "Saving Apartheid: White Internationalism at the End of the Cold War," "looked to white southern Africa for inspiration as it planned for the coming 'race war.'" This apocalyptic fantasy of racial conflict in places such as Zimbabwe and South Africa shaped "The Turner Diaries." And in turn the novel, first serialized in the pages of a white nationalist periodical in 1975 and then published as a stand-alone volume in 1978, became a touchstone for the American and global far right.

"The Order," a white supremacist terrorist group responsible for three killings, including the murder of the Denver talk-radio host Alan Berg, took its name from the book. And Timothy McVeigh, who bombed the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people, carried passages from the book on his person and once sold the book at gun shows.

The ideas, images and language of "The Turner Diaries" have long since entered the gestalt of far-right ideology. The book hovers there even when it isn't mentioned. In his manifesto, for example, Dylann Roof — who murdered nine people at the Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, S.C. — frames himself as a martyr and calls on white Americans to fight a race war against Black people.

Today, you don't have to look far or dig deep to see the ambient influence of "The Turner Diaries" on the far right. You need just to spend a little time in the online world of the richest man on the planet, Elon Musk (although to be clear there is no direct evidence that Musk has read the book).

The owner of X gets a pass for what he says and does there. That's not OK.

The Musk of the mainstream media is an enthusiastic, if awkward, technologist, industrialist and would-be government reformer, as seen in his now-defunct Department of Government Efficiency. But Musk spends much of his time on X, his social media website, where he amplifies far-right accounts and shares his own white nationalist, anti-immigrant politics for all the world to see.

Over the past month in particular, he has adopted the imagery of a recent film, "Citizen Vigilante," in which the actor Armie Hammer spends the run time playing a Charles Bronson-esque character who targets alleged criminals, framed mostly as Arab and African migrants. Musk uses that imagery to state his views about what must be done to save Western civilization.

"Yes," replied Musk to an image of a gun-toting Hammer clad in black with the caption, "First the traitors then the invaders." He also shared a post from a different user who explained that the point of "Citizen Vigilante," in which the Hammer character "spends the first half of the movie murdering white people not migrants," is that you must "always hang a traitor before you hang an enemy." Musk repeated this several times, including in a post that simply said, "Traitors before invaders."

Recently, Musk again posted that we must "Deal with traitors before invaders" and then said a few days later that "Anyone who opposes remigration is a traitor."

JOULES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"Remigration" is the call, from far-right European political parties, to forcibly remove nonwhite citizens to their supposed countries of origin, regardless of whether they are immigrants or native-born. It is essentially a form of ethnic cleansing and it is envisioned as a response to the supposed "Great Replacement" of white Europeans with nonwhites, an idea originating from a different work of far-right fiction, "The Camp of the Saints," published in 1973.

As Musk sees it, opponents of remigration are traitors to "the West." And as "traitors" their proper fate, according to the logic of his posts, is to be killed as punishment for their role in the demographic transformation of majority-white nations and, presumably, as a warning to those who might pollute the national bloodstream by welcoming nonwhites into their lives and into the country.

Musk's preoccupation with demographic "traitors" flows directly from his obsession with population collapse, which he frames in terms of shrinking European and white American birthrates. "White people are a rapidly diminishing minority of the global population," Musk wrote in September 2025. "Low birth rate," he later said, "is the number one threat to the West followed closely by migration. There will be no West if this continues."

One might even see his destruction of the United States Agency for International Development — responsible, so far, for an estimated 700,000 deaths worldwide — as consistent with his concern with falling white birthrates relative to those in places such as sub-Saharan Africa, where U.S.A.I.D. was active. After all, one way to secure a future for Western children, in this zero-sum view of the world, would be to starve African ones.

Musk, it should be said, insists that no one has died because of his cuts.

In a recent interview with The Economist, Musk denied that he was a racist, even as he defended his far-right views of immigration. "If you have a large and growing, rapidly growing group of people whose beliefs are antithetical to Western beliefs, at some point, there will be a reckoning," he said.

But those views, as we see, are indistinguishable from what you would find in "The Turner Diaries." With hundreds of millions of followers on a platform he personally controls, Musk stands as the most prominent purveyor of far-right and ultranationalistic rhetoric in the world. This is the same Musk who is also busy leveraging his vast wealth to shape that same world in his own image.

And what is that image?

As Quinn Slobodian and Ben Tarnoff show in their book "Muskism: A Guide for the Perplexed," an important part of Musk's vision is to see the world as a compound, where "the horizons of humankind" are shrunk "into the defense of white fertility." This in turn is tied to a larger effort to liberate humanity from the "woke mind virus" that Musk sees as a self-destructive tendency responsible for the "empathy" that has led Western nations to open their societies to others.

This too is little more than a restatement of themes and ideas found in "The Turner Diaries," where the titular character believes that whites have been corrupted by a "Jewish-liberal-democratic-egalitarian plague." Slobodian and Tarnoff observe that these views are also downstream of Musk's upbringing in South Africa, where apartheid leaders fretted over birthrates and the future of white society.

Musk's virulent racism and vicious, disturbing views are no secret. He does not hide them. They sit in plain view, easily accessible on the social media website he owns, where he does everything he can to promote similarly far-right and white supremacist ideas.

If there is a question to ask, then, it is this: Why does Musk get a pass? Why do politicians, journalists and commentators treat his far-right racist radicalism as a sideshow rather than the core of his political, ideological and industrial project, seen in everything from his deep support for Donald Trump in the United States and Restore Britain in Britain to his decision to construct a massive pollution-generating data center in predominantly Black Memphis?

Musk spends a large part of his free time fomenting violence and spreading the same hateful ideology that motivated some of the deadliest shootings and attacks ever to happen on American soil. It is that fact, and not the cars he builds or the rockets he launches, that ought to define his place in public life.

Whatever this is in Iran, it isn't working

FRENCH, FROM PAGE 9

your skies are open to enemy attack.

The Trump administration has put forward two contradictory messages — that there's no shortage of missiles in the American inventory and that the shortage is Joe Biden's fault (because he helped to arm Ukraine and launched airstrikes against the Houthis).

The administration is certainly acting as if our stocks of munitions are perilously low. We're engaged in an on-again, off-again conflict (Friday, on; Saturday, off) that has been filled with unusual pauses.

Let's put all this together: The initial American strategy failed, the war with Iran is consuming the entire region, Iran and Ukraine are risking a face-off, there is evidence that both Russia and China are escalating their military commitments, American munitions stocks are dwindling and Trump is raging.

I've often wondered what it was like to be alive in the summer of 1914, much less in 1938 and 1939. When did people start to realize that the world was on the brink of catastrophe? Speak up too soon or too frequently, and you look ridiculous — like the Chicken Little of world war. Speak up too late, and you live (if you live) with bitter regret.

I'm not trying to predict anything, and I hold out hope for de-escalation. I know there are still serious people in the American government (whether they have Trump's ear is a different question) and in allied governments across the world.

KENNY HOLSTON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

But we can analyze the events and trends of the moment, and right now all the momentum is toward greater escalation. And we absolutely cannot do what Trump asks, which is to "just sit back and relax" and trust that "it will all work out well in the end."

I do not think that world war is inevitable, nor do I think it is probable. But it is more possible now than it has been at any time since the end of the Cold War, and the American government is led by the worst rulers in the modern history of the United States.

Congress, the only branch of government that possesses the power to intervene, has been prostrate before the president. The threat of a primary loss is all it takes to completely remove the spine from a typical Republican member of Congress.

It's often said that your average American voter doesn't really care that much about foreign policy. In general, that's true — until there's a catastrophe. When that happens, though, foreign policy isn't just the main thing; it's the only thing that truly matters.

Our future may depend in part on American voters deciding to give Congress a spinal transplant. But that requires us to do something that democracies have rarely, if ever, done successfully — see the catastrophe coming and act decisively before a terrible war swallows the world.

How Hollywood keeps its secrets

RYAN, FROM PAGE 9

enough to speak out against them. Truth tellers are often told they're misreading their own experience, that everyone else is cool with what's happening, and that they'll never work again if they talk.

The women interviewed in the Leto documentary are, like the hundreds of sources I've personally interacted with, regular people who risked a lot by coming forward. In my opinion, they did not do it for money, attention or acclaim — they often get the opposite — but to try to prevent what they went through from happening to others.

The truth is, a bombshell like the BBC's documentary should not be necessary, as there were published reports of Mr. Leto's sleazy behavior as early as 2005. There's also been a steady stream of gossipy intimations online and outright accusations in social media posts. But that's precisely why the BBC's work is so valuable. I don't mean to disrespect those who come forward via social media but it's much harder to ignore or dismiss a documentary than an Instagram post.

Even when allegations come via deeply reported pieces, another pattern has became clear: Waiting out the furor can actually work. Louis C.K.'s sold-out comedy tours, Grammy win and new Netflix special are all indications that a so-called cancellation usually has a built-in expiration date. PR people and powerful managers often count on members of the public having short attention spans and a willingness to give previously beloved celebrities the benefit of the doubt.

Maybe the latest furor around Mr. Leto will die down and he'll land yet another plum role. A 2027 tour for his band, 30 Seconds to Mars, is already in the works. As the media landscape has become more perilous, the appetite for this kind of contentious reporting has seemed to fade.

It's telling that it took a full-length documentary from the BBC to deliver what one hopes will be a clarion call about an actor whom so many people have already tried to raise the alarm about. But take it from me, one of the rare reporters to have done misconduct reporting for many different kinds of publications: Sometimes you need a big legacy media brand to do a huge, unimpeachable investigation (that lawyers have vetted six ways from Sunday) to finally make a difference.

Will it stick this time? Nobody knows. This kind of reporting always requires a leap of faith and the consequences are never assured.

But "Hollywood's Dark Secret" sends a timely, urgent message: Those who think they have impunity should not assume they'll have it forever.

MAUREEN RYAN *is a former TV critic and the author of "Burn It Down: Power, Complicity, and a Call for Change in Hollywood." She is working on a book about "Battlestar Galactica."*

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Sports

The Knicks' win was bigger than basketball

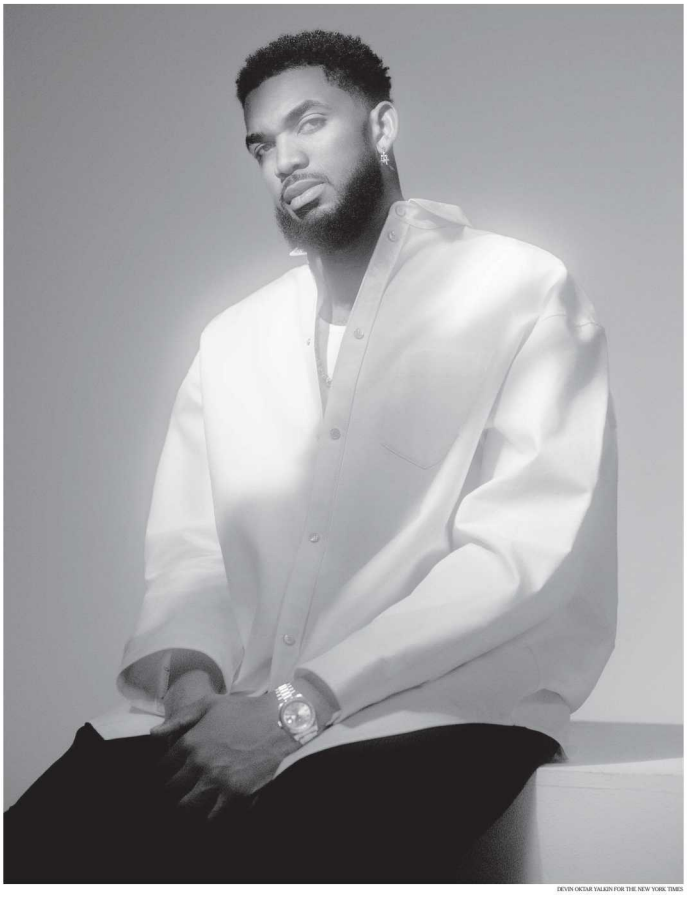
THE INTERVIEW

Karl-Anthony Towns is still processing the team's achievement

BY DAVID MARCHESE

When the New York Knicks acquired Karl-Anthony Towns from the Minnesota Timberwolves in 2024, it was in the hope that the star center would help the team get over the hump from good to great. Well, that worked out nicely. Towns, a native New Jerseyan who grew up supporting the Knicks, was a crucial contributor to the team's glorious championship run this past spring, and was arguably its most important player not named Jalen Brunson.

If there's one area in which Towns, who is engaged to the actress and influencer Jordyn Woods, is unequaled among his teammates, it's his willingness to display his emotion both on and off the court. The eloquence and honesty with which he spoke during the finals about being motivated by the loss of his mother, and also his naked displays of elation and frustration as he dueled against the San Antonio Spurs' phenom Victor Wembanyama, further endeared him to fans. We spoke about that, as well as his path to the N.B.A., the team's interpersonal dynamics and what it means to win a championship for the long-suffering Knicks faithful.



DEVIN OKTAR YAŞLIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"It just shows New York is so unified with each other when you give them something to be unified for."

The New York Knicks center Karl-Anthony Towns grew up in New Jersey but supported the Knicks. "Growing up, seeing the Knicks not be able to win the championship and then to be in a Knicks jersey and be the one to do it — it's an honor, it's a blessing," he said.

You know, even on the way into the studio for this interview, there were people congratulating you and wanting to shake your hand. And when I've been talking to Knicks fans, people say, "I can't believe that happened."
I still can't believe it.

How does winning feel to you now, about a month after? Growing up, seeing the Knicks not be able to win the championship and then to be in a Knicks jersey and be the one to do it — it's an honor, it's a blessing. I still can't fathom that we've done it. People call me champ and I'm like, I don't know why they keep calling me that. But it's something that we've earned and the city has earned: the right to call ourselves champions.

I want to do some pure relive-the-magic fan service with you right now. Game 4 of the finals ——
I don't know what happened in that game. [Laughs]

No one knows what happened in that game! But that's the game that people are going to be talking about years from now. In the first half, you guys were getting your butts kicked. Talk to me about what you were thinking and feeling late in that half when you were down almost 30.
We were getting our ass kicked. They're hitting shots. We're not hitting many shots. They were bringing more physicality to the game than us. I've seen what we can accomplish when all the odds are against us. Last year we had the same situation in Boston Game 1 and Game 2. At halftime, I told the guys: We have experience coming back from these moments, especially in the playoffs. Just trust our experience, trust each other. Let's go out there and let's swing for the fences. At least give ourselves a chance.

And then when in the second half, do you think, All right, this might happen? Is it early in the fourth that you hit the three falling down?
Oh yeah, the step back? Was that not a foul? No, I'm just playing with you. Don't answer that.

I know you were trying to get a foul.
Don't answer that, don't answer that. I thought we had a good chance of winning when I walked in the building.

Oh, come on.
Obviously, as the first half was going on, I was like, Man, maybe I was wrong. But in the second half, as soon as we got it into that 15-point range, I felt good about our team finding a way to win.

When you're starting to claw back, do you feel the Spurs tightening up?
Sometimes when you're a young team, you look to *not lose* the game, and we were looking to win the game. That was what made us bring such aggression. I think they were trying to protect the lead, and if you look at our playoff run, you've seen us get a lead, and instead of protecting the lead, we're trying to build the lead.

I think there was one stretch where the Spurs took something like nine three-pointers in a row. Maybe a more mature team takes a different approach.
This is my first time hearing that they took nine threes. Even if it was six, seven, eight, we weren't aware of that, because we're so locked into the game just trying to find a way to get a stop, go back down the court and make a bucket. You're not really thinking about what type of shots they're shooting. They had some shots at the end, but we did such a great job as a team just sticking with it, finding ways to make that one bucket, get that one stop. And of course the right hand of God came through, OG (Anunoby) getting a tip in.

You need to tell me about OG's play. Where were you on the court?
I'm right next to him. I was gonna dunk it in. I see OG flying in the sky and I'm like, if he tries to tip the ball back in and it goes off the front rim, I'm going to dunk it back in. OG made it. It was something special. The play was designed to go to me, and then two people guarded me. We finally got the ball to J.B. [Jalen Brunson], and J.B. took a quick pull-up three, and OG, who was inbounding the ball, found himself with no one on him, and he crashed to the board and got the offensive rebound, which was the tip-in, and found a way to make the bucket. It's going to go down as one of the greatest plays in New York history. One of the great plays in N.B.A. finals history.

When you see that ball go through the hoop, what is that feeling? Are you even having thoughts?
No. When you see me in the game, it's so loud I didn't hear the whistle. I just see people running on the court, so my first reaction is to tell everyone to get off the court right now and stay focused on the game, but then I look back and see the ref grabbing the ball and I'm like, Oh, it's a timeout. I see OG, and OG is very, uh, OG.

He doesn't have a lot to say.
New York all knows how OG is. I saw him, and it was one of those things — you want to hype him up and stuff. I have such a close friendship with OG. I was like, Nah, you're gonna get a hug for this one. This is a career-changing bucket for all of us. And he gave us a chance. We still had to get a stop, and he gave us a chance to get that stop.

Did OG have more to say about that play in the locker room?
No. OG has no reaction, no emotion on his face whatsoever. And he was just like, Yeah, I guess I made it. [Laughs]

You know, you're known for being a sweet guy. Even just talking to you now, you smile easily, you were joking around in the green room. But I can imagine that being a professional basketball player pushes you toward a kind of ——
Aggression?

Aggression or hardness. Is that something that came naturally, or did you have to develop that side of yourself?
I was definitely more aggressive when I was younger. I had a mean streak, because I understood what it was to be the young kid playing with the older kids. There's no respect given to the young kid. I had to go earn it. Every day I learned how to earn it when I was 13 playing U-16 basketball, U-17 basketball, going out there and competing against the best of the best at age groups way higher than mine. And when you're doing that, you understand you've got to bring that kind of aggression to the game. As I got older, I had the finesse, I learned the physical attributes, I got my strength and my maturity going and I also learned how to maintain it. My mom taught me really well how to take that aggression and utilize it to my advantage.

You spoke very movingly about your mom in an on-court interview after Game 1. You lost her during Covid, and you talked about how she was there with you. Did you think during the playoffs, I am here trying to commemorate my mother?
You know, I've dedicated my life to this game. Precious time I could have been hanging out with her, enjoying life with her — I spent it in the gym working on my game, getting treatment on my body, mentally not always being 100 percent present because I'm thinking about that opponent coming up. I've sacrificed so much for this game. It would be a disservice to her if I didn't try to capitalize on this opportunity as much as possible. I wanted to make her proud.

Did you find yourself thinking about her at moments during the games?
I think about her all the time. It's not just basketball. My life doesn't revolve around basketball — it's just my job. I still have a whole life outside, and I think about her with the basketball in my hand and not.

In news conferences and on the court interviews after the game, the way that you're willing to show your emotion and be vulnerable is not something that we necessarily encourage in professional athletes. Did you consciously decide to put yourself out there in that way?
No. I'm just myself. I'm not trying to be anybody. I'm just trying to answer the questions as honestly as I can. And in doing that, I guess my personality shows itself sometimes. I'm not going to say sorry for any of it, because that's how my mother raised me. She told me to be comfortable in my skin and to never diminish my light.

My wife was watching a lot of the playoffs, and she watched you do interviews and then watched Jalen Brunson do them, and she was like, Jalen's the dad of the team, and KAT is the mom. You're more open emotionally, more expressive. He's kind of buttoned down. Is that how it plays out behind the scenes?
That's intriguing. I'm going to say that to J.B. I don't think it's too far off. Aren't we both like our parents? He gives Rick energy, and I give Jacqueline energy, and that's beautiful.

Let me ask you some league questions. Giannis Antetokounmpo went to the Heat. Jaylen Brown went to the Sixers. Who are you most worried about in the East?
The Knicks. That's all I need to worry about.

Do you get why Jaylen Brown is now on the Sixers? Of all the teams for him to end up on, the Celtics trade him to one of their biggest rivals!
It's pretty fun. Like I said, control the controllables. If I worried about all the uncontrollables in my life, I'd be lost in the sauce.

But of course, your buddy Mitch Robinson is now on the Celtics.
That was a tough one.

In good conscience, could the team do hack-a-Mitch if you were playing the Celtics? That would be heartbreaking.
I don't even know if I could look at Mitch with a Celtics jersey on after everything, so I'll just have to start laughing at Mitch when we see each other. He owes me a pickup truck.

For what?
I don't know, I just want a pickup truck.

Watching him shoot free throws as a fan is the most emotional roller coaster experience.
It's an emotional roller coaster, watching a man shoot free throws?

Because you want him to succeed so badly!
It's not like walking up to a woman at a bar.

That's easier! What is the experience for the teammates watching Mitch shoot free throws?
Oh, we love it. One, it gets a foul and puts us closer to the bonus. Two, every time it happens, it gives us breaks to reset. And three, we believe in Mitch. We believed in everyone on that team, one through 15. We see each other put the work in. So when he goes up there, we're excited because we can't wait to talk junk if he makes it.

To be able to represent joy for people in New York City seems like such a privilege. Talk about what that means to you.
To bring so much joy to families, especially those families that have previous generations of Knicks fans who have been begging for a chance to be in the N.B.A. finals, let alone winning the N.B.A. finals after 53 years — I feel like a "Love Island" character getting back my phone after the playoffs and seeing these reels and these videos and these Instagram posts about the grandfather celebrating with his son's kid and passing that kind of Knicks fandom down to the kid, or the father who grew up watching the disappointment of 1999, or families who have lost loved ones going to the cemetery to celebrate the Knicks win with them.

I know how special it is because I saw people in Brooklyn cheering, and they got their own N.B.A. team! [Laughs] It just shows New York is so unified with each other when you give them something to be unified for. Inspiring hope is one of the hardest things to do, and for us to be able to do that is something special.

So, last question: The margins in professional sports between winning and losing are so slim.
One small decision changes everything.

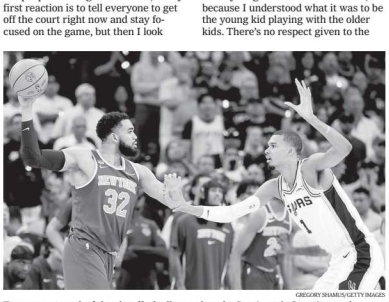
Last year, for example, you guys were up big in the playoffs against the Pacers in the fourth quarter, and they pulled off a comeback against you. This year, OG tips in a shot that if he missed ——
I am dunking that.

I know you're saying you would have dunked it.
I'm telling you, I'm dunking it.

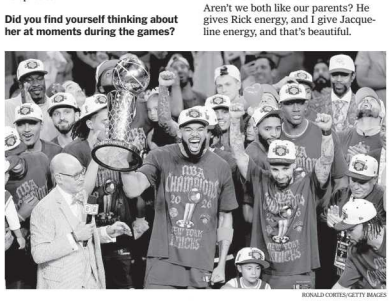
But OG's was a miraculous shot. And then just the level of intensity and focus that winning takes, it seems almost unbelievable that you can do it once. Does it seem even more daunting to think about winning it again?
Well, my competitive spirit says, That's what we're planning to do. We were always the underdogs in every series. We've got to be ready to be looked at as the favorites. And that's not something we like a lot, so we're going to have to go out there and continue to have that underdog mind-set. We're going to have to be an even better version of ourselves, even though a lot of y'all say we were one of the best ever in the playoffs. We've got to find another level, because people are going to be ready for us this year. All right, I'm going to say it: back to back. I ain't going to say that.

Thanks, champ.
Appreciate it.

This interview has been edited and condensed. A longer version is online at nytimes.com/theinterview or as an episode of our podcast "The Interview."



GREGORY SHAMUS/GETTY IMAGES



RONALD CORTES/GETTY IMAGES

Towns spent much of the playoffs dueling against the San Antonio Spurs' emerging superstar Victor Wembanyama, above left. The Knicks won the best-of-seven finals series 4-1, claiming the team's first N.B.A. championship since 1973. Above right, Towns celebrating with his teammates after Game 5. "I still can't fathom that we've done it," he said.

FIFA's president flew too close to the sun

Commentary

BY SEBASTIAN STAFFORD-BLOOR
THE ATHLETIC

Gianni Infantino has met his Icarus moment.

The FIFA president's plan to sell stakes in the World Cup was only revealed on Tuesday. By Friday night, it was in tatters.

Led by fierce opposition by its president, Aleksander Ceferin, UEFA, the governing body for European soccer, threatened a boycott of FIFA competitions by its 55 member nations unless the proposal was abandoned.

CONCACAF, UEFA's counterpart in North and Central America and the Caribbean, also rejected the proposal. The Asian Football Confederation condemned it, and Infantino's senior adviser, Carlos Cordeiro, a former head of U.S. Soccer, resigned in protest.

In the face of all that, FIFA intended to push on with the scheme and take it to a vote, but less than 24 hours later it had pulled the plug. Given the stances and the extent of the opposition, there was no way it could have succeeded.

Whatever happens next, whatever the repercussions are for Infantino, this saga will be remembered for its hubris and for being the moment when the FIFA chief, who has consistently been allowed to challenge the boundaries of his authority, finally got too close to the sun.

Among 48 hours of memorable quotes, one of the most pertinent came from Bernd Neuendorf, president of the German Football Association, who revealed that he had first learned of Infantino's plans by reading about them in the media.

BENOIT TESSIER/REUTERS

Gianni Infantino, left, the president of FIFA, international soccer's governing body, with Aleksander Ceferin, the president of UEFA, the European soccer confederation, which threatened to skip major tournaments.

JIM WATSON / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Carlos Cordeiro, Gianni Infantino's senior adviser, resigned from FIFA to protest the plan to sell stakes in the World Cup.

"This news has surprised us," Neuendorf told Kicker, his country's top soccer news outlet, on Wednesday. "I'm also a member of the FIFA Council — FIFA's highest body — and one would expect to be informed in advance about such a significant decision, about such a process. Especially since it's such a far-reaching project."

Neuendorf said the plan had never been a topic of discussion in the council. "I was very surprised, and also annoyed, that we had to find out about something like this from the press," he said.

The FIFA Council on which Neuendorf sits has 37 members, Infantino included, with representatives from the game's six continental federations. It is international soccer's most senior executive body.

But there is no evidence yet that it was involved in any of the planning behind FIFA Forward Enterprises, which was to be led by an investment group headed by Joshua Kushner, the brother of Jared Kushner, President Trump's son-in-law and adviser.

On Friday morning, FIFA issued a new statement, a third clarification in two days, insisting that a planned "consultation process was disrupted by incorrect media reports."

It's not immediately clear which reports it considers incorrect or how it prevented any prior consultation, but those details are incidental. The damage is done.

Some of the most influential figures in international soccer, among them members of FIFA's highest committee, had been blindsided by a complicated, controversial and divisive piece of legislation because they had had no prior warning of its existence.

It was a staggering oversight.

Power brokers tend to come with big egos, to say nothing of their political influence. In a video released late on Tuesday, a worn-looking Infantino, delivering a scripted monologue on camera, attempted to reframe the proposal in response to the media's reporting. The plan had been misunderstood, he said, in a weary, patronizing tone, and it was merely his attempt to cure soccer of its inequities.

But if this move was taken in good faith — lower your eyebrows, please — then what was the virtue in keeping it secret? Doing so only risked antagonizing members of the international soccer community and creating suspicion.

The answer seems to be that this is what the FIFA presidency has been allowed to become. As such, any reflection on this episode must involve proper evaluation of the office itself and the limits of its power. If being FIFA president can convince someone that an initiative this profound can be developed outside of committee and in private, then it must be reformed to guard against such hubris.

"I was very surprised, and also annoyed, that we had to find out about something like this from the press."

And it's that overreach — the flouting of consensus — that appears to have Infantino in the kind of political trouble he has so often managed to evade over his decade in the job.

Many of the stakeholders complaining now have tolerated worse. World Cups have been played in Russia and Qatar on Infantino's watch. The hosting procedure for the 2030 and 2034 tournaments was contorted to prevent Saudi Arabia from facing opposition.

Calls for boycotts have been made before, but never has one been threatened in such a serious way, despite the litany of issues that have infringed upon the game.

This has become the line in the sand, perhaps, because it appears to conform to a growing pattern of unilateral behavior.

One of the frequent refrains from the past few days is that Infantino has been trying to sell something that does not belong to him. Increasingly, he acts as if it does, with this latest affair further evidence that, rather than an administrator, he sees himself more as soccer's broker, the owner of its power and the arbiter of what it should be used for.

After President Trump was awarded FIFA's inaugural Peace Prize last December, no evidence was presented to show that the decision had gone beyond Infantino himself.

When hydration breaks were inserted into each half at the recent World Cup, the body that makes the laws of the game was not consulted. Nor was it given a say when a nearly 30-minute halftime show was shoved into the tournament's final when the laws of the game stipulate that the halftime break should last 15 minutes.

There are serious points to be made. About Iran, about the abandonment of political neutrality, and that smirking, incredulous news conference Infantino gave ahead of the tournament — the "chill and relax" moment when questions were posed in support of punitive immigration actions.

Then there are more anecdotal issues. The Folarin Balogun affair. The self-celebration of his 10-year anniversary as president. Or, most recently, a raging Instagram post, in which Infantino accused his critics of "spreading hate" and showed his disdain for anything approaching criticism.

This is part of the problem. In its rushed response to this crisis, FIFA has exposed how unprepared it was to explain itself. Within that perhaps lies a more alarming realization. Maybe there was no planned communication strategy because when Gianni wants something to happen, that tends to be enough. But not this time. And the sport must never find itself in this position again.

The Mini Crossword

8/3/2026

BY CHRISTINA IVERSON
EDITED BY JOEL FAGLIANO

ACROSS

1 Fire enthusiast, slangily
5 Q: Why did the farmer ___ under his tractor?
6 Many buildings on campus
7 A: So he could wake up ___ in the morning!
8 Aliens, for short

DOWN

1 Braid, to a Brit
2 Hollers
3 Depend (on)
4 Photo ___ (publicity events)
5 One of two often sold in a box

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

	D	E	C	A	F	
	C	I	C	A	D	A
A	L	M	O	N	D	S
D	A	P		N	E	T
M	U	L	L	E	D	
I	D	E	A	S		
T	E	S	T			

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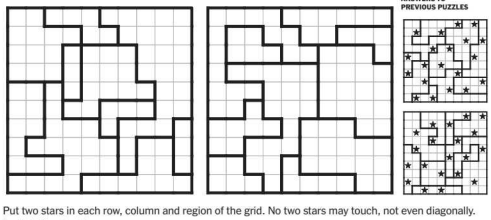
Two Not Touch



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES

Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

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Brain Tickler

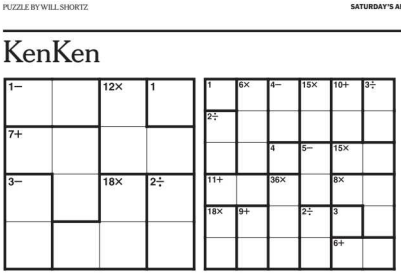
Which of these words is *not* an anagram of a well-known island?

BAIL ERECT HORDES KEYS LATINO TRAUMAS

PUZZLE BY WILL SHORTZ

SATURDAY'S ANSWER Eden's, dense, needs

KenKen



ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PUZZLES

2	1	4	3
3	2	1	4
1	4	3	2
4	3	2	1

2	4	1	6	3	5
1	3	6	2	5	4
3	5	4	1	2	6
6	2	5	4	1	3
4	1	3	5	6	2
5	6	2	3	4	1

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

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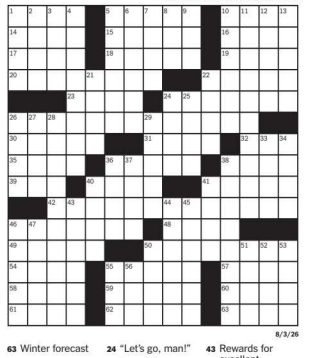
Crossword | Edited by Will Shortz

PUZZLE BY WILLA ANGEL CHEN MILLER



8/3/26

ACROSS

1 What's paid
5 Slowpoke in a "mobile home"
10 Figure that might be measured in acres
14 What a diaper pail helps minimize
15 ___ bear (cuddly toy)
16 Device used in a lactation room
17 Size between mini and maxi
18 Humiliate
19 Ancient Peruvian society
20 Idler along the seashore
22 "Pumpkin eater" in a nursery rhyme
23 Speak at the top of one's lungs
24 Needle-working craft
26 Kitchen appliance for desserts
30 Division in a supermarket
31 Travel like slime
32 One lacking refinement
35 Chess game's end
36 Children's author A.A. ___
38 Throw with force
39 ___ constrictor
40 Phase in which users help catch bugs
41 Instrument on which reveille is played
42 Series that may feature forensics experts
46 Ninja's quality
48 ___ whiskey
49 Surgery that leaves the patient looking better?
50 Adjective describing 20-, 26- and 42-Across
54 Guesstimates for when planes are due, for short
55 Donation at some Red Cross events
57 "Best Dad ___" (message on a mug)
58 "The King" in soccer
59 Competitive thing to "bring"
60 Still red, as steak
61 Uno + dos
62 All gone from the dinner plate
63 Winter forecast

DOWN

1 Head-scratcher?
2 Garfield's perky-eared canine buddy
3 Coke or Pepsi
4 Toddler's wheels
5 Horses' hangout
6 Cosmic cloud
7 Eve's man
8 Passports and driver's licenses, for short
9 Aid in making soap
10 Per individual
11 Rehearsal
12 Host with a mic
13 A world ___
21 "Present!"
22 Hawaiian seafood dish
24 "Let's go, man!"
25 Demolish
26 First two syllables of "I am what I am," aptly
27 Farewell in Florence
28 Opportunity to buy some antiques
29 Back tooth
33 Guthrie who sang "You can get anything you want at Alice's Restaurant"
34 Went by plane
36 Convene
37 What a mosquito bite causes
38 Swindling sorts
40 Swoleness
41 Taco ___
43 Rewards for excellent employees
44 Stereotypical cry after "Honey ..."
45 ___ voyage (first trip)
46 Caught some Z's
47 Product of Maine or Idaho, informally
50 Jacket
51 Pavlov known for canine experiments
52 Roman emperor who competed in the Olympics (and "won" every event he was in)
53 Got bigger
55 Snookums
56 Alternative to JFK and EWR

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

T	R	A	S	H	T	A	L	K			A	P	B	S
V	A	G	U	E	I	D	E	A	S		B	A	L	I
D	I	A	D	E	L	O	S	M	U	E	R	T	O	S
A	N	T	S		S	U	S	A	N	L	U	C	C	I
D	Y	E		M	I	T	E	S		K	P	H		
			D	O	T		N	U	T		T	W	I	N
R	C	C	A	R		A	S	T	R	O	N	O	M	Y
I	R	A	N	I	A	N		R	I	V	E	R	A	S
G	A	R	G	A	N	T	U	A		A	S	K	M	E
A	P	S	E		Y	E	T		O	R	S			
		H	R	T		D	I	S	H	Y		C	O	T
A	M	A	Z	E	B	A	L	L	S		G	A	B	E
C	O	R	O	N	A	T	I	O	N	R	O	B	E	S
M	I	E	N		M	E	T	P	A	Y	R	O	L	L
E	L	S	E			D	Y	S	P	E	P	S	I	A

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Culture

Tuned to the struggles of Black Londoners

A restored documentary examines the poetry of Linton Kwesi Johnson

BY PATRICIA MESCHINO

The poet Linton Kwesi Johnson in "Dread Beat an Blood," a 1979 documentary. His lyrics depict the racism and marginalization faced by Black Caribbean immigrants in Britain.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SEVENTY-SEVEN

Early in the 1979 documentary "Dread Beat an Blood," the 27-year-old poet Linton Kwesi Johnson recites a verse that sketches the challenges facing Brother Buzza, a Jamaican-born character living in London: *"De bredda say him broke, him say him nah work / him say his woman a breed, him say him don't even have a stick of weed."*

Noting Johnson's Jamaican roots, a British reporter asks him if he plans to remain in Brixton, the South London neighborhood where Johnson has lived since 1963. "England is as much my country as Jamaica," he replies with a genteel tone that belies the intensity of his words. "Most Blacks who come here have a dream of returning home. But we have a very important struggle in this country at this time, and I want to be a part of that struggle."

The newly restored documentary, directed by Franco Rosso, opened last month in New York and has had a theatrical run in several U.S. cities. In the film, Johnson performs and records verses from his poetry collection and album of the same title, with lyrics that vividly depict the racism and marginalization faced by Black Caribbean immigrants in Britain. His recitation is supported by intricately layered, dub-infused reggae grooves that established the subgenre he called "dub poetry," a cousin of hip-hop that originated in collaboration with the bassist Dennis Bovell and his stellar Dub Band. The works presaged the violent clashes between Brixton's Black immigrants and the police in 1981 and after.

Johnson's work continues to connect with modern audiences. In 2002, he became only the second living poet, and the first Black poet, to have his work included in the Penguin Modern Classics series with the volume "Mi Revalueshanary Fren: Selected Poems." And Johnson was asked to perform his "New Craas Massakah," about the 13 Black youths who died in the New Cross fire in London in 1981, for the director Steve McQueen's 2020 film series, "Small Axe."

During two conversations, in the New York borough of Brooklyn last September and by phone from Brixton last month, Johnson, 73, discussed the documentary, his work now and what it has been like to witness younger generations discover him. The interviews were edited and condensed.

Having previously watched its original broadcasts on the BBC, have you had a chance to view the restored film?

No, and I don't have any intention of watching it, either. What is really fantastic about all of this is the director Franco Rosso is getting some well-deserved attention. He didn't make too many films but the two films he's known for, "Babylon" and "Dread Beat an Blood," are significant because they both offer snapshots of the Black experience in Britain after the Second World War, the perspective of the second generation of Caribbean immigrants to England. Franco deserves praise for taking the initiative to choose those subjects for his films.

How was Franco Rosso introduced to you and your work?

I was in the Black Panther movement, a young activist and one of the people picketing outside of the criminal court when nine activists were on trial for rioting, incitement, as a consequence of a demonstration against police brutality in Ladbroke Grove. Franco Rosso directed the original documentary about the Mangrove Nine. I'd released two collections of poetry, "Voices of the Living and the Dead" followed by "Dread Beat an Blood" in 1975. I was part of the campaign to free George Lindo [a Jamaican immigrant convicted of armed robbery based on a false confession obtained by the police]. So Franco would have known me from those circles.

In "Dread Beat an Blood," you explain that your poetic cadence is built around reggae bass lines. When writing, do you hear the bass line first or do the words dictate the musical flow?

I've always been interested in the language of music and the music in language. When I write my verse, I try to bring out the musicality within the language and I build everything around the bass lines. On my first three albums, "Dread Beat an Blood," "Forces of Victory" and "Bass Culture," my late school friend Vivian Weathers played bass, and on a few tracks it was Floyd Lawson. After that it was Dennis Bovell — Dennis was the producer, he did the mixing, and we worked out the songs' arrangements together. People think Dennis's bass lines are wonderful [laughs]. They're my bass lines, but I couldn't make them sound as good as he does.

What prompted your decision to stop performing live with Dennis and the Dub Band?

I have a serious problem with my lower lumbar region. I can't stand up very long without being in an awkward position. When that music is happening you can't stand around like a statue: You at least have to move your knees or shake your legs.

How did growing up in Chapelton, Jamaica, shape your early life?

I was raised in the hills of Clarendon until age 11 when I moved to England, and everyone there was involved in farming. We all had responsibilities, even if it was just feeding the chickens. It was the best time of my life. That's where I absorbed elements of Jamaican folk culture that have stayed with me ever since. Folk songs, church songs, riddles, and at Christmas time, Jonkonnu [a traditional parade of costumed dancers accompanied by goatskin drums, shakers and bamboo fifes]. We had no radio, television or electricity so we had to entertain ourselves.

You've said that your father was illiterate, your mother was semiliterate. Was there anyone around you that fostered your interest in poetry and writing?

No. My grandmother was illiterate, and she'd ask me to read the Bible to her. I got to like the language of the Old Testament, Psalms in particular. The interest in poetry came about later. As a Young Panther, I discovered African American literature. My original inspiration to become a poet came from W.E.B. Du Bois's book "The Souls of Black Folk," the political poetry of Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks and Amiri Baraka and the Last Poets. Their discourse was African American everyday speech, accompanied by percussion. I used to recite my poems with percussion in a group called Rasta Love, young Rasta guys I went to school with.

Looking back at your work spanning the 1970s through the 1990s, how do the themes of political resistance and activism resonate in today's world?

It offers a historical perspective because I'm of the past [laughs]. People might pick up some understanding of the struggles we fought in England, how it corresponds with the antiracist struggles that were being fought in the United States and the sense of solidarity on different sides of the Atlantic. My journey through poetry and music was really a learning process through which I was able to chronicle important moments, like the New Cross fire or the Brixton riots.

When did you last sit down to write a poem?

Steve McQueen made a series of films called "Small Axe"; he asked me to write a poem for a piece about the New Cross fire. That was in 2021 and it was very short, about eight lines. Before that I wrote "Reggae Fi Mama," an elegy for my mother who was dying. Seeing my mother in Jamaica in 2019 and realizing that would be the last time I would see her alive was the inspiration for that piece. Some poets have to write a couple of lines every day but I've only ever written when there's something that moves me to write.

What are you currently working on?

Over the past 25 years I've had one ambition: to make an instrumental album of my own musical compositions and play the bass myself. I've completed that [an album titled "[Speechless]"]. Dennis Bovell helped me to arrange the music and he mixed it. I might release it as a limited edition next year, or maybe it will be released posthumously. That was my big thing, so I don't have any artistic ambitions anymore. I've done quite a bit, so my greatest ambition in life right now is to arrive at a state of complete contentment, to be at peace with myself.

How does it feel to see a new generation discovering your work?

It's great to have people bigging you up in your old age. It's better they do that while you're alive because when you are dead, who cares?

Spider-Man has grown up, but there's still homework

MOVIE REVIEW

The latest movie suffers from the weight of tying all of the stories together

BY ALISSA WILKINSON

COLUMBIA PICTURES/SONY PICTURES

Tom Holland in "Spider-Man: Brand New Day," the fourth in this particular series of Spider-Man movies.

Spider-Man's story has always been, on some level, about the terrifying experience of growing up. One morning, you discover your body is changing and doing things you can't quite control, and you have to figure out what to do with that. As winningly played by Tom Holland, Peter Parker has been a kind, openhearted teenager who wants to do the right thing and is horrified that his powers often put everyone he loves in the path of danger. At the end of "Spider-Man: No Way Home," he asked Doctor Strange to cast a spell that would cause the whole world — including the love of his life — to forget that he was Spider-Man, because it was the only way to save his universe from destruction.

"Spider-Man: Brand New Day," directed by Destin Daniel Cretton from a screenplay by Chris McKenna and Erik Sommers, picks up where "No Way Home" left off. Peter lives alone now that his aunt May (Marisa Tomei) has died, and MJ (Zendaya) and Ned (Jacob Batalon) have gone to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As years go by, Peter watches them from afar via Ned's social media updates. Spider-Man is beloved by New Yorkers again, so he fights crime and chats on the phone with Detective Jean DeWolff (Liza Colón-Zayas), never revealing his identity as Peter Parker. Occasionally he crosses paths with Frank Castle, a.k.a. the Punisher (Jon Bernthal).

But a weird threat menaces the city, a vengeful entity seemingly jumping from person to person. It's apparently seeking something that's hidden at Damage Control, the organization that was created to do cleanup after the Battle of New York but turned a bit more authoritarian over time. The director of the organization, Bill Metzger (Tramell Tillman), explains that he's not sure what the entity is after, but the goal of Damage Control is to harness destructive energy and turn it to something good. They're hoping to just keep everyone safe, he says.

At the same time, Peter has his own issues with energy, because his arachnid hormone levels are spiking, giving him major headaches and the ability to shoot web fluid from his wrists instead of his suit. He wants nothing more than to tamp down his powers, to return to the abilities that he knows well. And it's imperative he does this before the entity gets to MJ, who still doesn't know who he is.

There is, of course, a lot more, some of which I can't tell you; Sadie Sink has spent the last year dancing around questions about her role in this movie. "Brand New Day" is the fourth in this series of Spider-Man movies, and it feels like a cap on the growing-up arc that this iteration of the character has gone through. If "Homecoming" was about adolescence, and "Far From Home" was about growing through the loss of a mentor, and "No Way Home" was about taking responsibility for your actions, then this is, in part, about deciding to accept your adult powers, even when they scare you.

It is not, unfortunately, nearly as fun as the previous few films, though that may just come with the territory. Much of the lighthearted comedy that made the other movies so amusing is gone, largely because Peter's relationship to Ned and MJ has changed drastically, which means the bantering chemistry between Holland, Batalon and especially Zendaya is mostly absent. In its place is an emotional heaviness, which compounds in some of the film's other plot threads.

The film is also bogged down by the same thing that has caused late-stage Marvel Cinematic Universe films to sag: the weight of tying all of the stories together. For instance, if you're not a walking encyclopedia of M.C.U. lore — or didn't watch "Daredevil" Season 2 and "Daredevil: Born Again" Season 1 and the two-season "Punisher" TV show and the "Punisher: One Last Kill" Marvel TV special — you might not know who Frank Castle is or why he and Peter know each other, which seems like an awful lot to expect of your audience.

Spider-Man has been tied into the M.C.U. since he appeared in "Captain America: Civil War" (2016), thanks to a deal between Sony Pictures Entertainment and Walt Disney Studios (which owns Marvel Studios), and he's in several "Avengers" movies. Although other M.C.U. characters crop up in the stand-alone Spider-Man movies, sometimes with substantial roles, the films have still mostly felt like character-driven features about Peter and his friends. Even "No Way Home," with its many winking ties to other movies, was mostly about various generations of Spider-Mans (Spiders-Men?), not really the M.C.U.'s main arc.

This movie feels as if it's carrying more franchise weight on its shoulders, and that leaves less room for emotional weight. It's more scattered as a result, and while hardcore M.C.U. fans might be pleased, the rest of us are, demonstrably, getting kind of tired of having to do our homework.

Nothing can erase the enjoyment of witnessing Holland's performance, which remains winsome and wonderfully kinetic even if you know that's got to be a computer-generated Spidey a lot of the time. As he's grown up on-screen, his audience has grown up with him. The question this film asks is one that has cropped up over and over throughout comic book cinema: What do we do with our specialness? For the most part, Peter has chosen to stay local and hidden, to undo the damage done when people know his powers. But now he has to either accept who he is and let himself be known again, or stay in the shadows and take the clean slate promised by the title.

Similarly, a slice of his audience has gone from teen to new adult in a world where creative powers — especially exceptional ones — are seen as something that might be taken from you and put to profitable use. Peter even considers whether there might be a way to create a device that puts everyone on a level playing field, and that doesn't seem coincidental. If movies subconsciously tap the anxieties of their audiences, maybe this one is about the terrifying experience of growing up and discovering that everyone sees what makes you special and wants it for themselves.

Painter's canvases scamper and fly onstage

Tim Foster's niche craft involves the delicate art of coloring ballet shoes

BY MARGARET FUHRER

If you take the elevator at the David H. Koch Theater at New York's Lincoln Center as high as it will go, then climb another flight of stairs and walk down a cinder-block hallway, you will reach a small space that looks like a cross between an artist's studio and a chemistry lab. This is where Tim Foster paints ballet shoes.

To be a shoe colorist for New York City Ballet, as Foster has been for 15 years, is to occupy a small yet important niche. Most pointe shoes and ballet slippers are manufactured in a pale pink. But the company's repertoire requires a rainbow of hues, like canary yellow for the ensemble of Marzipan Shepherdesses in "The Nutcracker," or powdery blue for the Butterfly soloist in "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

In his tiny aerie, Foster — the company's first full-time shoe colorist — sprays and daubs hundreds of shoes each season. It is a delicate art. He must match costume colors exactly, so that the footwear doesn't break the continuous line of the leg. And paint must be applied sparingly, painstakingly, so as not to change the feel of the shoe on the foot.

As a former professional dancer, Foster, 73, understands the stakes. "When they give you their pointe shoes to mist or to dye, that is a responsibility I take very seriously," he said in a video interview. "It *has* to be right, because it's their sacred tool. It's their violin. It's their oboe."

For years, almost nobody outside City Ballet knew that Foster or his job existed. Then the documentary filmmaker Joshua Charow, who often profiles unsung heroes, stumbled across a City Ballet blog post that mentioned Foster's work. "Right away, I was fascinated," Charow said in a video interview. "But I couldn't find any other information about him."

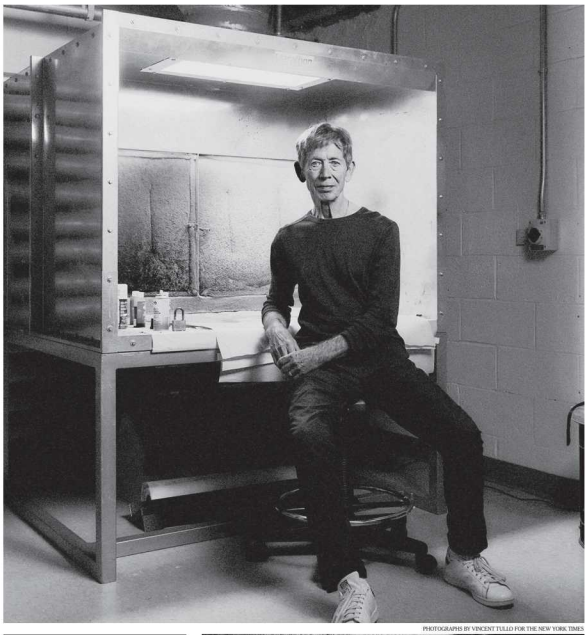
Earlier this year, Charow connected with Foster and filmed him discussing his past as a dancer and his work with City Ballet. Charow was delighted to discover that Foster had also quietly been making visual artwork. His shoe-painting station is lined with white paper that becomes spattered with different colors over time. He uses pieces of that paper to create fanciful, Chagall-esque scenes, incorporating the residual splotches of shoe paint.

"I just start sketching over the top of the paper that kept all the splatters and marks," Foster says in Charow's documentary, "Shoes for Tim," which came out in July. "I lose myself in it."

Foster's job has become busier recently. Pink shoes, meant to approximate skin color, used to be a ballet costume default. But a few years ago, City Ballet became one of several ballet troupes to rethink "ballet pink," adopting truly flesh-toned footwear instead. Today, each company member has a shoe shade custom-matched to their skin. That requires a lot of painting.

Naomi Corti, a City Ballet soloist, said in a video interview that she now visits Foster before nearly every show — to get her shoes touched up, yes, but also just to talk. Gentle and thoughtful, Foster has a knack for soothing preperformance jitters.

"He always knows what to say because he's one of us, a dancer," she said. "It's this very calming presence. He's like the heartbeat of the theater."



PHOTOGRAPHS BY VINCENT TULLO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"He always knows what to say because he's one of us, a dancer. It's this very calming presence."

As a dancer, Foster was both an early and a late bloomer. His father was in a country western band, and as a child, Foster and the daughter of the guitarist would sometimes dance for the crowds at barbecues and country clubs in the Pacific Northwest. By junior high, he was organizing lunchtime dances at school. "You would grab your girlfriend and do the boogaloo or the skate," Foster said.

But he had no formal dance training until he enrolled at Lane Community College in Eugene, Ore., and began performing in musicals. That was how he met his future wife, Nickie (Crafts, at the time), an accomplished dancer and choreographer. "She told me: 'You want to dance? Well, you'd better get in class,'" he said. He began studying ballet and modern and was soon earning lead roles in local theater productions.

In 1986, the couple moved to New York City. Foster eventually began dancing with the now-shuttered New York City Opera — performing on the same Lincoln Center stage as New York City Ballet — and also in musicals in the city and on tour. "I was doing a lot of things all at once," he said.

Foster reuses paint-spattered paper from his work station to create his own art. "People seem to really enjoy these paintings, which sort of stopped me in my tracks," he said.

That stopped when Nickie was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004. "The dance work suddenly felt less important," Foster said. Seeking stability, he got a job in the wardrobe department at City Opera. Later he began working with City Ballet, dressing the children in "The Nutcracker."

His shoe-painting career was accidental. For a while dancers had colored their own shoes, but that led to inconsistencies in hue and appearance. "They said, 'Could you do the painting?' And I said, 'I guess,'" Foster said.

Though he had no art training or experience coloring shoes, Foster found he had a gift for matching shades. "I can figure out what makes that gray different from a regular gray," he said. "Is it that it has green in it? Pink in it? Purple in it?"

The ballets that involve the most painting, Foster said, are the big story productions: "The Nutcracker," "A Midsummer Night's Dream." But one of the trickiest is Jerome Robbins's "The Concert." He has to match the costumes' sheer blue tights, which allow the dancers' natural skin tones to peek through — meaning that each dancer requires a slightly different shade. "You're taking that blue color and stretching it with a neutral, so it's a film of blue," he said. "That took me a long time to figure out."

Foster has become an innovator in his small field, partly because he understands how to make dancers look and feel beautiful. Corti said he would sometimes "contour" her pointe shoes, painting portions of the satin slightly darker to make her arch appear more luxuriously curved. Once, she came to him upset about her shoes for a "Coppélia" solo, which were coated in a thick gray paint that made them inflexible. "It's a big jumpy part, and it was so hard to do in this crunchy shoe," she said.

The next day, Foster brought her a pair of what she called "Cinderella slippers," with a light coating of silver. "I wasn't cramping any more — everything *felt* so much better," she said. "He changed my experience of that ballet."

Over the past few years, Foster has returned to dancing. His wife eventually recovered from breast cancer, but in 2013 he, too, received a cancer diagnosis. Treatment required removing much of the muscle from the back of his right thigh. As he recovered, dancing helped him relearn his body. "I started over, doing my own barre work, just trying not to get stuck," he said. "Walking was the hardest thing to do, actually. I can always manage to dance."

For 15 years, Tim Foster, left, has painted the shoes for New York City Ballet dancers. Most pointe shoes and ballet slippers are manufactured in a pale pink, but the company's repertoire requires a rainbow of hues. Foster must match costume colors exactly to maintain the continuous line of the leg, and paint must be applied sparingly.

Now he tries to dance as often as possible — sometimes with Nickie, who is "strong as an ox," he said. The documentary even prompted a homecoming of sorts, with Charow filming a poetic sequence in which Foster dances on the Koch Theater stage for the first time in 25 years.

When Foster began making his shoe-paper paintings, he had no intention of selling or displaying them. "I didn't really take it seriously," he said. "I'd paint them, roll them up, forget about them." He has given a few to dancers as gifts, including one to the City Ballet star Megan Fairchild when she retired earlier this year. And he gave one to Charow — packaged in pointe shoe shipping bags and tied with a shoe ribbon.

Since the release of the documentary, Foster has been surprised and moved by viewers' responses to his artwork. "People seem to really enjoy these paintings, which sort of stopped me in my tracks," he said. He's now considering a showing of some kind. Each fall, City Ballet's Art Series asks a visual artist to make site-specific work for the theater; Corti said she would love for Foster to get that invitation.

Charow's documentary caught Foster just in time. He's planning to retire soon. But first he hopes to train new shoe colorists. The goal, he said, is to create the smallest possible ripple of disruption in the dancers' lives.

"I know how live theater draws *everything* out of you, even as it feeds you," he said. "Those of us behind the scenes, we just want to make it possible for the dancers to let go and dance."

The ugly battle over the politics of beauty

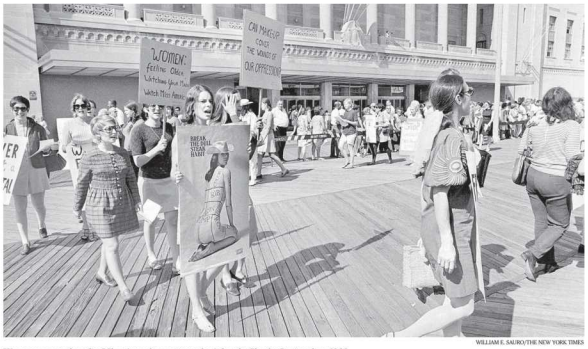
BOOK REVIEW

Liberation Summer: The Moment That Changed the Women's Movement and the Future of American Politics
By Micki McElya. *Avid Reader Press. 525 pp. $32.*

BY KATIE ROIPHE

In September 1968, a boisterous feminist protest against the Miss America pageant spilled across the Atlantic City boardwalk as contestants in the first Miss Black America contest drove past in a convertible, and counterprotesters shouted things like "Go back to Russia, you ugly, lezzie, commie whores." It was here, Micki McElya argues in "Liberation Summer," that the pressing question of who defines beauty, what it means and how it is deployed to subjugate women entered the mainstream cultural conversation.

In this lively, stylish social history, McElya, a historian at the University of Connecticut, creates portraits of assorted activists, journalists, beauty queens, conservative icons, lawyers and visionaries involved in changing the political terrain. We read about how the white activist Bev Grant's boyfriend threw out her copy of "The Second Sex" when she tried to discuss it and how the Black lawyer Florynce Kennedy got arrested trying to walk down her own street. We see the winner of the first Miss Black America pageant reading a poem she wrote about a little girl who thinks her skin, lips and hair are ugly.



WILLIAM E. SAURO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Women protesting the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in September 1968.

McElya's approach follows in the tradition of David Halberstam's "The Fifties" by invoking a remote time through vibrant scenes and characters. (Halberstam himself makes a cameo in the book with a casually sexist characterization of the trailblazing female New York Times editor and reporter Charlotte Curtis as a "bright, tough little broad.") By placing the reader in various rooms where second-wave feminists concoct and jostle over their plans, McElya brings this colorful bit of lost history to life.

Hindsight tends to organize women's political progress into a stirring story of passionate dedication and inspiring sisterhood. But McElya makes clear that there was also an enormous amount of strife. She dives into the divisions and power struggles at the heart of the women's liberation movement. At one point, an organizer prohibits one would-be protester from carrying a sign that reads, "There's No Good Man but a Dead Man."

The radicals interested in fighting capitalism clash with the feminists trying to sway mainstream American women. The virulently anti-male faction, aligned with Valerie Solanas's SCUM Manifesto, alienates the more practical political types. McElya describes a particularly heated meeting of radical women's groups in Sandy Spring, Md. One of the participants mentions Betty Friedan, adding, "as much as we may hate her." The meeting devolves into raised voices and open hostility.

McElya also relates an excruciating conversation at the same gathering, which consisted exclusively of white women, about the need to bring Black women into the mix. This is a rare glimpse into the struggle to define a cause that contained many conflicting elements and narratives. We see just how many different women's movements collided in what we now think of as "the women's movement."

"Liberation Summer" documents the ways in which prominent women felt they had to comply with traditional ideas about beauty even as they fought to transcend them. McElya touches on the irony of the media's fixation on conventionally beautiful women's movement figures like Gloria Steinem, and the difficulties faced by less telegenic ones like Betty Friedan. McElya tells the dispiriting story of how Friedan, her appearance under intense scrutiny, dyed her hair red, only to have it turn green within days.

While "Liberation Summer" is highly engaging, I found myself longing for a bit more of the literary and cultural backdrop. Toni Morrison's critically acclaimed 1970 novel "The Bluest Eye," for instance, played with the themes of white and Black beauty, but it goes unmentioned.

There are also a few striking omissions in McElya's discussion of the feminist literature of the period, including Germaine Greer's wild, impassioned international best seller, "The Female Eunuch" (published in the United States in 1971), which addresses the oppressiveness and self-loathing involved in aspiring to conventional beauty standards. This splashy book would certainly have been read and talked about in the early-1970s circles McElya covers.

At the end of "Liberation Summer," she gestures toward the current environment surrounding beauty politics in the Trump era. She notes the beauty queen-like figures who have surrounded Trump, even at the cabinet level. She underscores their exaggerated feminine features and the apparent time and effort put into maintaining a "Mar-a-Lago face." This seems almost to be the point: proof of a commitment to traditional gender roles.

McElya concludes her book by noting the strange and persistent endurance of oppressive beauty standards, and the political ideals undergirding them, in spite of the obvious progress women have made. More than half a century after the "liberation summer," we find ourselves not very liberated at all.

Katie Roiphe is the director of the Cultural, Reporting and Criticism program at New York University and is currently working on a book about Janet Malcolm.

TRAVEL

On a cliff, testing the limits of my fear

A via ferrata tour helped one jittery hiker confront his acrophobia

BY CHRIS HIPPENSTEEL

I stood perched on a ledge, a river churning some 30 feet below and a line of people waiting at my back. A suspension bridge with three cables, one for my feet and two for my hands, stretched across the chasm like a tightrope. A tremor was already creeping up my legs, and I had nowhere to go but forward.

Like everyone on the tour of Ausable Chasm, a gorge carved into the Adirondacks in upstate New York, I wore a harness to catch me if I fell. Maybe it would save my life, but it didn't do much to ease my anxiety.

We were following a via ferrata (Italian for "iron path") that zigzagged across the gorge and took us high onto its sandstone walls, clinging to metal rungs, unclipping and reclipping the two safety lines on our harnesses. This exhilarating route was, admittedly, a bizarre choice for someone like me, who struggles with a paralyzing fear of heights.

But that was precisely why I was standing before this swaying tightrope bridge. The via ferrata tour was just the latest round in my yearslong regimen of self-directed exposure therapy, which had already taken me onto scary rock scrambles and exposed summits across the Adirondacks, in an attempt to cure my acrophobia.

"Don't lead me to my death," joked the woman behind me as I tested the cable's give.

"I'll do my best," I said. Another step took me past the ledge, leaving nothing but open air and crashing white water below.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY OLIVER PARINI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Top, balancing on one of the four dizzying bridges at Ausable Chasm, a gorge carved into the Adirondacks in upstate New York. Above from left: a cargo net on the via ferrata, Italian for "iron path"; the view looking down from one of the suspension bridges; and climbers on the trail. Via ferratas have flourished in the United States in recent years.

A NATURAL NEXT STEP

Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th-century Danish philosopher and father of existentialism, saw in the fear of heights a metaphor for all human anxiety. Standing at a precipice, Kierkegaard imagined, a person becomes instantly and acutely aware of the power to jump — and with it, the dizzying breadth of human freedom.

I can't say that heights have ever granted me such an epiphany. But I know that something has always drawn me toward them, despite my trepidation. It was through hiking that I began to test the limits of that attraction.

I fell in love with hiking while I was living in Albany, N.Y., a gateway city to the peaks and cliffs of the Adirondacks. There, I gradually probed the limits of my fear, pushing myself closer to the edges of mountaintop overlooks, and then seeking out increasingly challenging routes that tested both my footing and my nerve.

It turns out there's science behind that approach. Incremental exposure therapy remains the gold standard for treating the fear of heights, said Dorothée Bentz, a clinical psychologist and researcher at the University of Basel in Switzerland.

"If people are treated, there's a response rate of about 80 percent," Dr. Bentz said. "But people have to engage," she added, "and that means you have to expose yourself."

A via ferrata seemed like the natural next step in that process.

Despite their dramatic vertical settings, via ferratas are, in terms of technical difficulty, not that far removed from a playground jungle gym. Climbers are harnessed in along the entire route, keeping at least one carabiner clipped to the safety cable at all times. Though the danger is limited, the exposure is not — exactly the type of challenge I was seeking.

Modern via ferratas were largely a product of World War I, developed as a makeshift system to move troops through the Dolomites as the Italian and Austro-Hungarian armies fought over the peaks. In time, those early installations would be refined into recreational climbing routes, featuring metal rungs and hanging bridges. From the Alps they spread worldwide, allowing thrill seekers everywhere to navigate sheer cliff faces and deep canyons.

Though via ferratas have flourished in the United States in recent years, options near New York City remain limited for the casual day hiker on a budget. The Adventure Trail at Ausable Chasm, a privately owned attraction just south of Plattsburgh, N.Y., was both inexpensive (about $20 for entry to the chasm, $45 for the via ferrata) and approachable.

CLIPPED IN

I drove up to the Adirondacks in late May, a few weeks ahead of peak tourist season, and headed to the chasm early the next morning to book a slot on the via ferrata. The roughly 90-minute guided tours are first come first served, and the property's website warns that they can book up fast.

Looking down from the rim of the gorge, I got my first glimpse of the via ferrata. I saw four cable bridges over the river, stretches of rock ledges and metal rungs between them. Sure, I thought, I could manage that.

A half-hour later, our 42-year-old guide, Colby Walker, was showing my roughly 12-person tour group how to clip and unclip our harnesses around obstructions, always keeping one secured to the safety cable that ran the length of the course.

I wound up at the front of the line, ahead of three friends in their early 30s — Kathryn Patton, Jacqueline LaPres and Mary Fredendall — in town for a wedding. We climbed a cargo net from the chasm floor up to a ledge, and I was the first to follow Colby onto the initial bridge.

Out over the drop, I began thinking in fractions: Just get a quarter of the way across, now half, now two-thirds. My stomach dropped each time my harness hit an obstacle, and I needed to refasten my carabiners to the next stretch of open cable, leaving me momentarily frozen.

Max Wühr, a researcher at Ludwig Maximilian University Hospital in Munich who has studied the fear of heights, later explained my reaction this way: Deprived of the nearby visual reference points that it relies on to control balance, my brain sensed that my body was unstable. My body responded in kind.

But with Colby and Kathryn's encouragement, I finally conquered Zeno's paradox — the notion that if you do something in fractions, you'll never reach the end — and made it to the other side, dismounting (another stomach drop) onto a set of metal rungs that ascended to a narrow ledge.

Another high-wire river crossing awaited. This one was more forgiving, with three metal cables underfoot instead of one. To soothe my nerves, I chatted with Kathryn, Jacqueline and Mary. Inevitably, we discussed our feelings about heights.

Kathryn loved them, she said. So did Mary. Jacqueline, not so much.

It turned out Jacqueline and I had both taken the same approach to exposure therapy, albeit in different parts of the country. She lives in Utah, and tested herself first in the state's national parks. But even conquering Angels Landing in Zion National Park, one of the country's most nerve-racking hikes, hadn't been enough to defeat her anxiety.

"I'm not as scared of heights as I used to be," she said. "But it's still not comfortable."

I sympathized. How is it, I thought, that the initial rush of panic still finds me, no matter how many times I face it, while others never feel it at all?

Take Colby, our guide. He moved along the cliff faces with practiced ease, talking all the while about the chasm's history. Was there ever a time, I asked him, when he'd had to conquer the fear?

He shook his head. "My parents had to keep me out of the pine trees when I was young," he said. "I've been climbing since I can remember."

THE BIG PIVOT

Now, another cable bridge — this one with wooden planks spaced far enough apart to pose a challenge — led us back across the chasm. The section that followed was the longest of the route: a stretch of narrow platforms and metal rungs anchored high on the rock wall between us and the final bridge.

Water trickled down from the layers of sandstone above. The slick handholds fueled my anxiety, and for a second time that day, a wave of terror froze me in place. I pushed it down and forced myself to inch along.

Standing at a precipice, people become acutely aware of their power to jump — and with it, the breadth of human freedom.

Eventually, I reached the last cable bridge, the highest of the crossings, sloping down from about 65 feet (20 meters) above the river. I had to make an awkward pivot from the metal rungs onto the bridge's first plank, a final jaw-clenching challenge.

But as I neared the bridge's midpoint, I noticed something strange: My legs felt steady. I didn't feel compelled, as before, to scramble to the next patch of stable ground. I stopped and took a deep breath. Yes, my hands still clung tight to the cables, but I felt almost at ease.

Later, safely back in my Brooklyn apartment, I told Dr. Bentz about my moments of panic on the course, and the peace that followed. Could any amount of exposure therapy, I wondered, ever fully banish the former?

Maybe not. Dr. Bentz explained that exposure therapy isn't necessarily about eliminating a fear, but learning you're capable of forging ahead despite it. And through repeated exposure — pushing past the mental barrier posed by fear, again and again — you can meaningfully blunt the anxiety response.

"It's not like you learned it and your brain is reprogrammed," she said. "It's more like the brain learns something new."

In other words: Courage takes practice.

I thought back to that moment of near-serenity, standing in the middle of the final bridge. For the first time, I could really see past my own feet and appreciate the way my shadow stood backlit against the frothing water below.

Like Kierkegaard's person at the precipice, I'd faced the dizzying prospect of my own freedom: the choice to turn back or step out over the void, and in doing so, to keep pushing the boundaries of my fear.

Easing the stress for travelers with autism

Neurodiverse children and adults can benefit from careful planning

BY JULIE WEED

For Johan Konst, 34, the noise, the stress of making connections and the feeling of dread he experienced when he was landing at night in an unfamiliar city used to make him want to avoid flying altogether.

Mr. Konst has autism, a lifelong condition that affects how people communicate, learn and behave. People with autism range from those who need significant help to those who live independently and need little help.

But Mr. Konst also has a job in public relations that requires him to travel internationally. So he has developed tactics to help make flying easier.

He books only early-morning flights, nonstop if possible. He has also invested in high-quality noise-canceling headphones. And after struggling to ask airport staff to help him find ride-hailing pickup spots, he began practicing small talk to make speaking with strangers easier.

People with autism don't have to limit themselves, Mr. Konst said, and "learning by doing" is important. The same goes for people who are traveling with a neurodivergent friend or family member. Experts say planning ahead and tailoring experiences to the traveler's needs can go a long way.

Here are some tips to make traveling with autism easier.

FOR CHILDREN:

MAKE A PICTURE BOOK: The book should show children what they will do or see at each stage of the trip and can include entries on security checkpoints, boarding and baggage claim. Expectations are important, so you might include descriptions like: "The plane will make noise and rumble and shake. It's exciting but you might feel a little nervous. That's OK!" said Dr. Rachel Labaton, the senior supervisor of psychological assessments for YAI, a nonprofit organization for people with developmental disabilities.

PACK A CALMING KIT: It might include noise-canceling headphones, sunglasses, fidget toys, hand-held electronic games, snacks, a comfort object and a nice-smelling mask, anything to promote a sense of well-being, Dr. Labaton said.

MAKE IT A GAME: Get through the different stages of the airport by turning it into a game, perhaps by drawing a map and awarding small prizes, Dr. Labaton said. The game can include recorded messages from special people sending encouragement or saying calming phrases like "You're safe, we're together."

PHILIP LINDEMAN

MAKE THE CREW AWARE: Make a card explaining a child's needs and share it with flight attendants, since it isn't always easy to have a conversation during the busy boarding process, said Karla Auker, the founder of the Neurodiversity Parent Guide. For example, the card could say something like: "Ben, age 8 — autistic, sensitive to loud noise and unexpected touch, prefers clear instructions." Crew members are better able to help if they understand the situation in advance, rather than when an issue arises, said Ms. Auker, a former flight attendant.

SCHEDULE SOME POST-FLIGHT DOWNTIME: When you get off the plane or arrive at your hotel, take some time to let everyone run around, chill out or do whatever they need to do to relieve the stress, said Jordana Izzo, the director of accessible travel at the travel agency Travelmation, who is the parent of a child with autism.

PRESERVE HAPPY MEMORIES: Take photos and make a book of happy memories to reinforce positive associations with travel, Ms. Izzo advised. And if things go awry, "you will get through it," she said, adding, "Don't let what might happen take away from what could happen" — the opportunity for a vacation together.

FOR EVERYONE:

CHOOSE THE RIGHT BOARDING TIME: If you need extra time to get settled and perhaps get engrossed in an activity, share your needs with gate agents and let them know you need to board early. Board with a later group if you don't want lots of people streaming by, or don't want to spend extra time in your seats.

MINIMIZE ON-THE-FLY DECISIONS: Decide in advance where in the airport you will eat, what you'll do if there are delays and where you'll sit at the gate (a seat with a view of the tarmac may be less stimulating). Avoiding decision fatigue can make things feel less overwhelming, Ms. Auker said.

SEEK OUT HELP: Autism Double-Checked, an organization focused on helping travelers with autism, offers a list of hotels, airports and destinations that have staff trained to support travelers with autism. For help in the United States with Transportation Security Administration checkpoints, especially for fliers with more severe autism, Alan Day, the chief executive of Autism Double-Checked, recommends contacting the T.S.A. 72 hours before flying to request a passenger support specialist. These specially trained employees can guide you through the process and make suggestions based on the passenger's specific needs.

Finally, keep track of what works and use that information to improve your strategies. Traveling might be hard at first, Mr. Konst said, "but if you do it enough, it will become easier."